

THE

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# EMERGING WORLD

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## High Stakes Bihar Polls Countdown Begins



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# THE EMERGING WORLD

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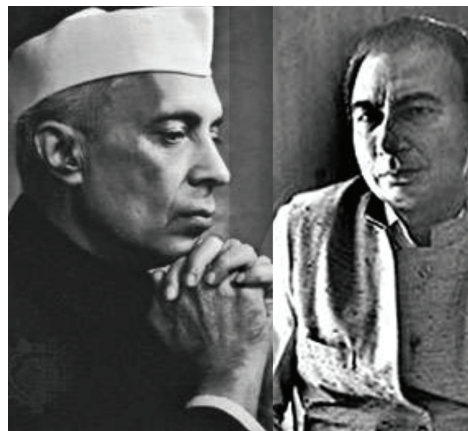
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**D**ear Reader, we are delighted to present the October 16-31 edition of your magazine, a comprehensive collection of analyses that navigates the turbulent political landscape of Bihar, dissects critical



developments in foreign policy, and critically examines foundational sectors like education and agriculture. This issue arrives amid an atmosphere of profound change and pressing challenges, both domestic and international.

Our focus begins with the eastern state of Bihar, which is currently embroiled in a high-stakes Assembly election following the official

announcement of polls by the Election Commission of India. What is unfolding is a complex, multi-polar contest, defined by intricate alliance dynamics and shifting social equations. The political environment is charged with a palpable anti-incumbency sentiment. This resentment is being parsed, targeting both the central BJP leadership and, notably, the veteran Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar.

Once lauded as “Sushasan Babu” (the man of good governance), CM Kumar now leads the ruling NDA into one of its most testing elections in years, battling the very waves of anti-incumbency that once swept his rivals out of power. Experts on this issue offer succinct and incisive analyses of this electoral battle.

A key feature is a threadbare analysis by a senior expert on political economy, examining the manipulative role of freebies in influencing voters' electoral behaviour. As the narrative is once again dominated by promises of cash transfers, subsidies, and giveaways—often interpreted as a form of bribe—the uneasy truth remains: Bihar's deep-seated problems, despite the loud talk of welfare, remain largely unsolved.

On the external front, this edition chronicles significant shifts in India's diplomatic engagement. We delve into the crucial visit of Sergio Gor, the U.S. Ambassador to India. Recently confirmed by the American Senate, Mr. Gor's six-day familiarisation trip focused intensely on advancing the bilateral trade relationship. His priority was clear: ensuring the trade equation is "fair" to American businesses. Against the backdrop of an unprecedented 50% tariff imposed by the Trump administration, Ambassador Gor specifically argued that “India's protectionist policies and regulatory barriers” are preventing the two democracies from fully realising their partnership.

Another significant story analyses the landmark shift in relations with Afghanistan, marked by the visit of Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban's acting Foreign Minister. His six-day trip, facilitated by a temporary UN travel exemption, is the first ministerial-level engagement

since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. This engagement signals a massive, albeit cautious, diplomatic re-evaluation in India's approach, which is explored by a young expert.

Finally, the international spotlight shines on the momentous Gaza Peace Summit at Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt, presided over by President Trump. Twenty world leaders hailed the ensuing agreement—which followed two years of devastating war—as a monumental achievement, declaring that “the long and painful nightmare is finally over.”

Domestically, we turn a critical eye to sectors under duress. Two academic commentators reflect on the crisis in higher education. Universities and medical colleges, institutions critical for knowledge production and professional growth, are expected to produce skilled professionals and serve public interests. Yet, when corruption penetrates these bastions, the symbiotic relationship between education and society is seriously betrayed. Another story paints an overall picture of the sector's downfall, noting that five years after the promising National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, schools are shutting down, universities are falsifying data, and students are burdened with debt.

The story of Indian agriculture embodies resilience amid hardship. Romanticized as the nation's heartbeat, it feeds over 1.4 billion people and employs over 50% of the workforce. However, beneath this veneer of tradition, prosperity remains an elusive promise, thwarted by structural inequities and volatile markets. Despite contributing about 18% to India's GDP, its growth has stagnated at 3-4% annually, far below the potential.

The edition also confronts the urgent menace of pollution. An internationally acclaimed environmentalist reflects on the deteriorating quality of life in our urban areas. The latest World Air Quality Report reveals that thirteen of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in India, with Delhi retaining the title of the most polluted capital city globally. India has been ranked as the fifth most polluted country in 2024, a slight improvement from 2023.

Rounding out the edition are two commentaries on literature: one reflecting on the recent Nobel Prize in Literature winner, and the other a piece on the ever-relevant Urdu poet Shahir Ludhianvi, who fell in romance with revolution. In the realm of business, a regular commenter pays tribute to Ratan Tata, the flag-holder of ethics, whose passing a year ago left an indelible imprint on captains of industry in India and abroad.

We hope this diverse and impactful issue, penned by well-recognized experts, enriches your understanding of the multifaceted issues shaping our world. The EW family wishes you a Happy Diwali. **Jai Hind!**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dinesh Dubey'.

( Dinesh Dubey )





# THE ELECTION THAT COULD REDRAW INDIA'S POLITICAL MAP

The Election Commission of India has officially announced the schedule for Bihar's forthcoming assembly polls, sparking a political storm across the state. With dates out, every political party—national or regional—has switched to “war mode.” The ruling NDA, led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, faces one of its most testing elections in years, while the opposition, riding on public discontent and youth energy, is confident of uprooting the “Nitish Raj.”

**Amit Pandey and Manoj Kumar Pathak**



Nitish Kumar, once hailed as “Sushasan Babu,” now finds himself battling the same waves of anti-incumbency that once swept the RJD out of power.

In 2020, the NDA managed to retain control with 125 of 243 seats—BJP securing 74 and JD(U) 43—while the RJD-led Mahagathbandhan bagged 110, with RJD alone winning 75. But in the five years since, Bihar's mood has changed. Public resentment over unemployment, rising prices, caste tensions, and the

perception of stagnation in governance has left the JD(U) vulnerable.

Political analysts suggest that this election may determine not only Bihar's next government but also the future trajectory of Indian politics. “If Bihar votes for change, it will not just end Nitish's long innings but also rejuvenate the national opposition's confidence,” says senior journalist Ajay Kumar. Recent surveys show Tejashwi Yadav enjoying 33% approval among youth voters, while Nitish trails with 24%, indicating a generational shift in Bihar's political sentiment.

Meanwhile, the BJP appears to be walking a fine line. The saffron party's growing strength within the NDA has fueled speculation that it intends to capture Bihar's throne independently. Nitish's once-expected elevation to the Vice President's post was quietly

# Seat-Sharing Turbulence in Bihar

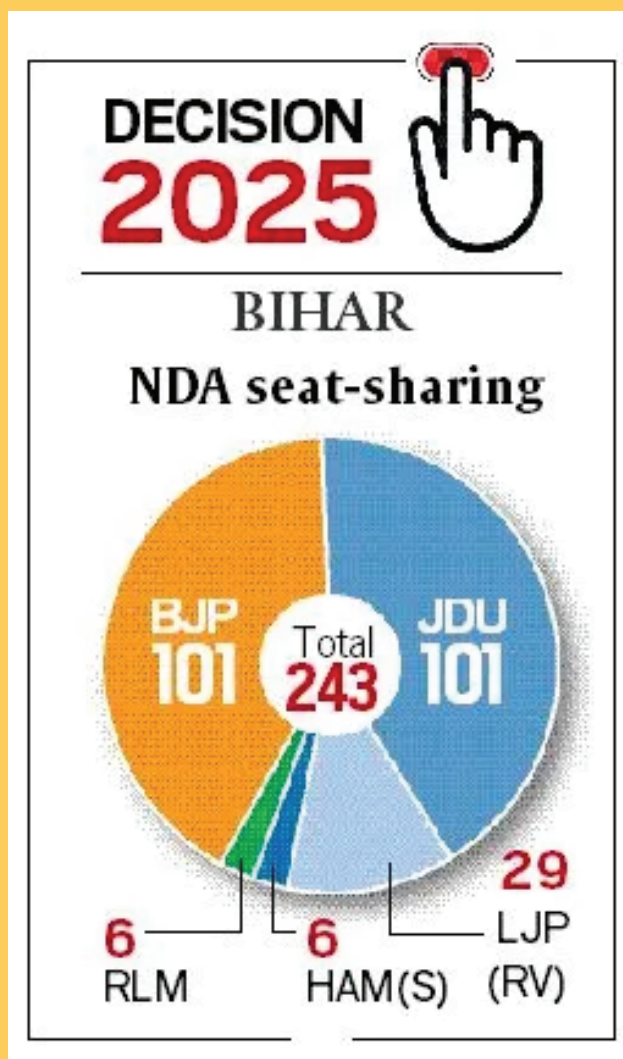
As Bihar braces for its upcoming assembly elections, the issue of seat-sharing has emerged as a critical test for both ruling and opposition alliances. With every political faction—national or regional—eyeing its fair share, the negotiations have turned into a tug-of-war that could reshape the alliances themselves.

In the ruling NDA, the BJP has attempted a delicate balancing act. It has reportedly allotted around 29 seats to Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), 6 seats to Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM), and a similar number to Rashtriya Lok Samata Party (RLSP) chief Upendra Kushwaha. However, dissatisfaction brews beneath the surface. Sources suggest that some partners are not content with the formula and may even reconsider their loyalty. The biggest flashpoint appears to be Upendra Kushwaha, who lost his Karakat seat in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections to independent candidate and Bhojpuri star Pawan Singh. Though later accommodated in the Rajya Sabha, Kushwaha is reportedly upset with his limited share and is keeping his options open.

Chirag Paswan, on the other hand, has emerged as the most visible face of the NDA's youth appeal. Despite being far junior in experience compared to leaders like Manjhi and Kushwaha, Chirag enjoys strong backing from the BJP leadership. His growing prominence, however, has ruffled feathers among smaller allies, who see him as a BJP creation meant to consolidate Dalit and youth votes under saffron control. "The NDA's biggest challenge is not the opposition but its own internal chemistry," said Patna-based political analyst Sanjay Jha.

The opposition INDIA bloc faces similar turbulence. The RJD, led by Tejashwi Yadav, is reluctant to share too many seats with its allies. CPI(M), which had an impressive strike rate in the last assembly election, demands more seats, but the RJD fears dilution of its Yadav-Muslim base. The Congress too finds itself sidelined—despite Tejashwi publicly endorsing Rahul Gandhi for the prime minister's post, he is reportedly unwilling to allocate even ten extra seats to Congress in the assembly pact.

Meanwhile, smaller outfits like Mukesh Sahani's Vikassheel Insaan Party are pressing hard. Despite representing the Nishad community, which makes



up barely 3% of Bihar's population, Sahani has demanded a deputy chief minister post and a sizable number of seats, creating additional friction within the INDIA camp. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), another ally in the INDIA bloc, is demanding 12 seats. If not acceptable, sources say it may reconsider alliance status. Political commentators recall that RJD has a long tradition of sidelining potential challengers to the Yadav family. "When Lalu Prasad was jailed, Rabri Devi became CM to preserve the dynasty. Tejashwi may repeat the same playbook," said a veteran observer. In this atmosphere of mistrust and ego clashes, the arithmetic of Bihar's alliances remains volatile. With polls around the corner, the question is not just who will win—but who will stay together till the finish line.

shelved by BJP's leadership, deepening the rift. A senior JDU functionary admits, "Nitishji's relevance in national politics is being questioned; this election could decide his survival."

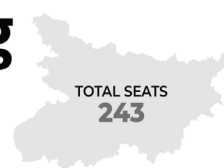
The opposition, on the other hand, has intensified attacks on the BJP over the "fake degree" controversies. RJD leaders mockingly allege that "BJP manufactures its own degrees," while JD(U) spokes-



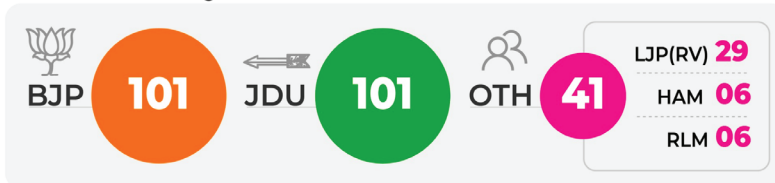
person Neeraj Kumar retorted, “BJP leaders hold degrees in subjects that Indian universities haven’t yet discovered.” The war of words reflects how Bihar’s politics thrives as much on satire as on strategy.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the NDA had swept Bihar with 39 out of 40 seats—BJP 17, JD(U) 16, and LJP 6—while the RJD-Congress alliance failed to win even one. But this time, the landscape is far less predictable. With youth voters restless, alliances fragile, and Nitish’s charisma fading, Bihar’s election is set to shape not only Patna’s corridors of power but also the direction of Indian politics in the coming decade. For Nitish Kumar, this might well be the most decisive battle of his career—the one that decides whether “Sushasan” remains a memory or makes a comeback.

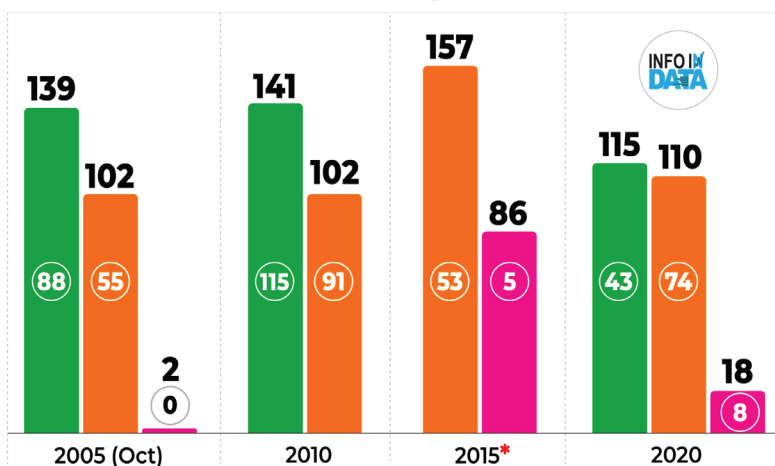
# NDA’s Seat Sharing Story in Bihar



## 2025 Assembly Election



## Seat Sharing in Previous Elections



\*JDU was part of Mahagathbandhan against NDA

Source: ECI, Media Reports



## PK Factor: The New Disruptor in Bihar’s Political Chessboard

As Bihar gears up for the 2025 assembly elections, one name that has emerged as a surprising disruptor is Prashant Kishor, popularly known as PK. Once the master strategist behind several successful political campaigns across India, PK has now turned from backstage to the battlefield, crafting his own political path through his movement “Jan Suraj.” For the past six months, PK has dominated Bihar’s political narrative through his articulate interviews, extensive ground tours, and sharp criticism of both the NDA and the opposition. His message resonates particularly with Bihar’s youth, who are disillusioned with the decades-old power tussle between Nitish Kumar’s JD(U) and Lalu Yadav’s RJD. Issues such as migration, unemployment, education reform, and industrial stagnation—long ignored in Bihar’s mainstream politics—are now at the center of PK’s discourse.

Political commentators note that his focus on creating an “educational and industrial Bihar” marks a shift from caste-based to developmental politics. “PK has introduced a vocabulary of modern politics in a state trapped in old equations,” says political analyst Prof. Ajay Kumar. His rallies attract students, first-time voters, and profes-



sionals—groups often apathetic to traditional campaigns.

What makes PK’s emergence more poised and purposeful is his decision to contest directly against Tejashwi Yadav from Raghapur, a symbolic seat that represents the RJD legacy. This confident step signals that PK is not merely testing the waters but preparing for a full-scale political challenge. His refusal to align with any party further underscores his independent positioning.

While established leaders dismiss him as a media creation, his growing traction on the ground cannot be ignored. As one senior journalist in Patna observed, “PK is not yet a king, but he’s fast becoming the kingmaker who could rewrite Bihar’s political grammar.”

## Promises Beyond Numbers

As Bihar heads into another election season, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav's promise to give a government job to one person in every household has drawn both attention and disbelief. While such declarations may sound appealing, they collapse under the weight of basic arithmetic and fiscal reality — exposing the deeper populism and intellectual stagnation within Bihar's opposition politics.

The 2023 caste survey puts Bihar's population at 130.7 million across 27.6 million households. Yet, only about two million people currently hold government jobs, including both state and central employees. To meet Tejashwi's promise, Bihar would have to create an additional 25 million government positions — a 13-fold increase. The financial burden would be staggering. Bihar's 2025–26 salary expenditure is ₹54,697 crore. Ex-

panding this thirteen times would take it to roughly ₹7 lakh crore — more than twice the state's total annual budget of ₹3,16,895 crore, excluding pensions and other costs. It's not just impractical; it's fiscally impossible.



### BIHAR'S CASTE SURVEY

TOTAL  
POPULATION  
OF BIHAR

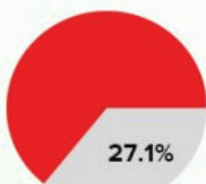
**130 Million**



OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES AND  
EXTREMELY BACKWARD CLASSES  
TOGETHER ACCOUNT FOR AROUND  
**63%** OF TOTAL STATE POPULATION



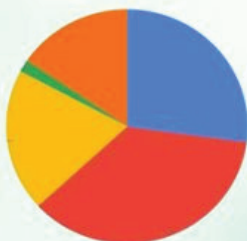
EXTREMELY  
BACKWARD  
CLASSES



OTHER  
BACKWARD  
CLASSES



THE SURVEY ALSO SHOWS THAT  
**YADAVS** HAD THE LARGEST SHARE  
OF TOTAL POPULATION  
AT **14.27%**



EXTREMELY BACKWARD CLASSES	36.0%
BACKWARD CLASSES	27.01%
SCHEDULED CASTES	19.07%
UNRESERVED	15.05%
SCHEDULED TRIBES	01.07%





This kind of populist overreach is not unique to Bihar. Indian politics has long been driven by exaggerated promises — from free power to loan waivers — with little regard for sustainability. But Tejashwi's pledge stands out for its sheer economic absurdity. It reflects a mindset that equates political appeal with fiscal fantasy, ignoring the realities of governance.

Lalu Prasad Yadav's politics once gave voice to Bihar's marginalised, challenging feudal hierarchies through the language of social justice. However, what began as a transformative movement has since fossilised into hollow symbolism. Tejashwi's campaign rhetoric mirrors this decline — seeking relevance not through reform, but through promises that cannot be delivered. Bihar remains one of India's poorest states, plagued by underemployment, low industrialisation, and mass migration of its youth. The real challenge is not distributing government jobs but creating a climate conducive to private investment, entrepreneurship, and skill development. The politics of empowerment must replace the politics of entitlement.

Ultimately, credibility in leadership rests on realistic planning, not grandstanding. Tejashwi's promise might win applause on the campaign trail, but it fails the test of economic logic. Bihar deserves leaders who confront reality with honesty and vision — not those who offer dreams without arithmetic and politics without purpose.

## Bihar's Vanishing Voters Debate

Political analyst Yogendra Yadav raised serious concerns about the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Bihar's voter list conducted in 2025. He alleged that the process led to the disappearance of nearly 80 lakh voters from the rolls. According to Yadav, Bihar's adult population (aged 18 and above) was estimated at 8.08 crore in July 2025, but the final voter list published in September showed only 7.42 crore registered voters—a gap of approximately 80 lakh.

Yadav argued that while SIR was intended to clean the voter list by removing duplicates and errors, it instead resulted in mass disenfranchisement, disproportionately affecting women and Muslims. He highlighted a sharp rise in missing women voters—from 7 lakh to 16 lakh, an increase of 9 lakh. He also pointed out that although Muslims make up 17% of Bihar's population, they accounted for 33% of the deleted names, totaling 3.66 lakh.

Calling SIR a “disease worse than the cure,” Yadav cited troubling statistics: 5.24 lakh duplicate entries, over 24,000 gibberish or nonsensical names, and 4.6 lakh unexplained additions to the voter list. He filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court, which responded by halting further deletions and restoring 65 lakh voters. However, Yadav maintains that the process still poses a serious threat to democratic integrity.



## Election Commission's Response

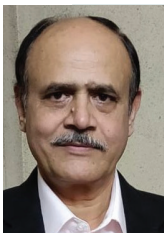
The Election Commission of India (ECI) defended the SIR process, stating that it corrected an inflated voter list—previously showing 105–107% of the adult population. They claimed that most deletions were legitimate, involving duplicates, deceased individuals, and non-residents, and that 98% of deleted voters were re-added. The ECI also noted that only 1,087 objections were raised regarding foreign voters, of which 390 were upheld. They dismissed allegations of bias and asserted that the process complied with all legal protocols.

**Counterargument:** Yadav contends that the ECI's data lacks transparency and that the 80-lakh gap contradicts their claims of success. He argues that the revision process unfairly targeted marginalized communities and undermines electoral fairness. In conclusion, the road to Bihar's 2025 election is neither smooth nor predictable for any alliance or contender. The ruling NDA, under Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary (popularly known as Susan Babu), is battling deep anti-incumbency and internal dissatisfaction among allies over seat sharing. Leaders like Upendra Kushwaha and Jitan Ram Manjhi have expressed discontent with their allocations, while Chirag Paswan's growing prominence—largely engineered by the BJP—has caused quiet unease within the coalition. On the opposition front, Tejashwi Yadav's RJD faces its own contradictions: while publicly endorsing Rahul Gandhi's leadership, Tejashwi remains reluctant to concede seats to Congress or Left allies. This internal friction, coupled with Mukesh Sahani's disproportionate demands within the INDIA bloc, has complicated unity efforts.

Adding to the churn is Prashant Kishor (PK), whose independent campaign rooted in issues of migration, education, and industrial revival has struck a chord with Bihar's youth. Though his popularity and media appeal are undeniable, translating admiration into votes will be his ultimate test. With Yogendra Yadav's revelations about missing voters still stirring public doubt over electoral fairness, Bihar's poll landscape stands on uncertain ground—where every alliance walks a tightrope and no victory is assured.

(Authors are senior members of EW's in-house team delving deep into the dynamics of Bihar assembly polls.)

# Battle for Bihar Countdown Begins



**Kumar Narendra Singh**

The forthcoming Bihar Assembly election is shaping up to be a complex, multi-polar contest defined

by intricate alliance dynamics, shifting social equations, and the rise of new political forces. The political environment is marked by a palpable anti-incumbency sentiment, which, while initially directed at the current regime, is being parsed into resentment against the central BJP leadership and the veteran Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar.

**Fractured NDA: Nitish Kumar Facing a Precarious Position:** The current regime in Bihar faces significant resentment, but the text suggests this is disproportionately aimed at Prime Minister Modi and the BJP rather than a deep, personal aversion to Nitish Kumar. However, this distinction may be politically academic, as the final electoral outcome will ultimately be counted against the incumbent Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar. His political fate is inextricably linked to the performance of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

A critical fissure is apparent in the NDA seat-sharing deal. The BJP's successful negotiation to equate its seat share with the JD(U)—or even secure a slightly higher share—has relegated Nitish Kumar to the position of a "little brother." This is a significant blow to a leader who has historically insisted on a "big brother" status in the state alliance. Furthermore, the allocation of seats previously held by the JD(U) to the BJP and Chirag Paswan's LJP(RV) has fueled this discontent. The reported move by Nitish Kumar to convene meetings and instruct his confidants and MLAs not to accept the arrangement signals a deep-seated frustration and the potential for open rebellion within his party.

Despite these challenges, Nitish Kumar remains a significant political force. His core social engineering—the consolidation of Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs),





Mahadalits, and a sizable portion of the Pasmada Muslims—forms a loyal and critical vote bank. These social groups are deeply attached to the movement and schemes initiated by Nitish, granting him a personal vote transferability that few other leaders possess.

The BJP is acutely aware of this leverage and cannot afford to make him unhappy over seat sharing, as his disaffection could splinter the NDA's social base. The

arm-twisting tactics of the BJP are thus a major risk, potentially angering Nitish's loyal supporters and leading to an electoral backlash against the alliance.

A perennial challenge for Nitish, however, is the upper castes, a traditional support base of the BJP. He knows they may ditch him in this election, preferring to vote for the BJP where his candidates are not in the fray, thus weakening his already diminished position.

## The Mahagathbandhan's Strengths and Internal Struggles

On the opposition front, the Mahagathbandhan (Grand Alliance) is fundamentally built around the magnetic appeal of Tejashwi Yadav, who holds the key to the alliance's success. The bedrock of the RJD's strength is the formidable M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) combination, which

accounts for approximately 30% of the state's total votes. This solid, committed base provides a strong starting point. Tejashwi's performance in the last Assembly election, where he emerged as the largest single party, demonstrated that voters have reposed their faith in his





leadership and focus on jobs and development.

However, the Grand Alliance is also grappling with internal disharmony, particularly over seat sharing. Reports of a deadlock, with both Tejashwi and the Congress expressing apprehension, point to a perilous situation. Tejashwi's ambition to become the Chief Minister will be wiped out if he fails to show a "big heart" and accommodate his allies.

This negotiation is further complicated by the renewed vigor of the Congress and Rahul Gandhi. While Tejashwi is undoubtedly the first choice of Bihar's youth—a sentiment driven by his successful focus on unemployment—it is Rahul Gandhi's recent 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' that is credited with creating a favorable environment for the Mahagathbandhan as a whole. The Yatra provided the alliance with a narrative of fighting for constitutional and democratic values.

Crucially, the Congress has successfully signaled its potential to draw votes from the RJD's traditional base. The reports suggesting that Muslims are now more inclined toward the Congress, and that a sizable section of Dalits may also shift their support to the party, puts significant pressure on Tejashwi. He must accommodate the Congress to ensure the transfer of these critical votes, or risk a major split in the anti-NDA electorate.

## The Wildcard: Prashant Kishor and Jan Suraj

The text posits that Prashant Kishor (PK) holds the biggest key to the election, a testament to the influence of his year-long 'Jan Suraj' campaign. The success or failure of both the NDA and the Mahagathbandhan is portrayed as being contingent upon the success or failure of Prashant Kishor's initiative.



PK's role is that of a disruptor and a potential vote-splitter. He is generally expected to dent the NDA's vote share because his campaign has primarily focused on governance failures, and his core support base is upper castes and the educated section. The upper castes, feeling neglected or dissatisfied with the JD(U)'s dominance in the NDA structure, may view Jan Suraj as an alternative

to the BJP.

Any dent in the NDA vote will directly favor the Mahagathbandhan, assuming a clean transfer of the splintered votes to the opposition. Conversely, if PK's party fails to gain traction among its targeted demographic and instead draws EBC/Mahadalit votes away from Nitish Kumar, or general protest votes away from the RJD, the overall equation could shift back in favor of a narrowly-winning NDA. PK's entry has thus turned the bipolar contest into an unpredictable, multi-cornered fight where a small percentage of votes for his Jan Suraj can be the deciding factor in numerous close contests.

## The Political Landscape: SIR's Impact and the Disenfranchised Voter: Needless to say that the political



consciousness created by the opposition campaign led by Rahul Gandhi and Tejasvi Yadav about the chances of millions of voters being disenfranchised by the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision has undeniably created a favorable pre-election atmosphere for the Mahagathbandhan, significantly boosting its poll prospects. To maximize this advantage, however, the opposition coalition must re-emphasize the issue aggressively throughout their campaign.

Despite the political opportunity SIR presents, the plight of those whose names have been deleted from the electoral rolls—the immediate "victims"—poses a complex challenge. Their reluctance to pursue re-inclusion stems from socio-economic barriers. The process of getting their names back onto the rolls often requires traveling to the district town, demanding both time and money. A significant portion of these victims are poor and belong to lower castes, lacking the financial resources for travel and the flexibility of time needed to complete bureaucratic procedures. Their existence relies on a daily wage (wedge in the original text, likely wage), meaning that even a single day missed for political or administrative purposes can be economically devastating. This precarity overrides political motivation. Furthermore, a perceived utter disregard for their fundamental needs and aspirations has led to a sense of political apathy or powerlessness.



The Mahagathbandhan must, therefore, find ways to assist these specific voters directly, perhaps through localized enrollment camps or financial support, rather than merely relying on the political momentum of the SIR issue.

**Galvanising the Electorate: The 'Vote Theft' Narrative:** In contrast to the passive response from the disenfranchised, the Mahagathbandhan's accusation of "vote theft" against the ruling BJP has proved to be a powerful, galvanizing force across the electorate.

This narrative has successfully captured the public imagination, transforming the abstract issue of electoral integrity into a simple, emotive, and highly resonant slogan: "Vote Chor, Gaddi Chhor" (Vote Thief, Quit the Throne). The effectiveness of this campaign is evidenced by its widespread adoption—even children are enthusiastically shouting the slogan. This simplification of the opposition's core message is key to mobilizing a broad base of voters and shifting public sentiment against the incumbent party.

The outcome of the Bihar Assembly elections is considered highly significant and will inevitably impact national politics in several key ways, serving as a crucial indicator and momentum-builder for the national parties and alliances. After the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, which saw the BJP-led NDA fall short of an outright majority and rely on allies like the JD(U) (led by Nitish Kumar) for stability at the Centre, a strong performance by a party or alliance in Bihar will significantly alter the leverage of its state-level leaders in national coalition politics.

A decisive win for the NDA would stabilize the ruling coalition at the Centre, affirming the leadership of its key players and potentially reducing the negotiating power of regional allies. A strong showing by the Mahagathbandhan (INDIA bloc), on the other hand, would validate the opposition's strategy of unity and give a massive morale and momentum boost to the national INDIA coalition, especially its most dominant regional component, the RJD.

**Validation of Core Political Narrative:** This election will also be a test of social justice and caste-based

politics as Bihar is the epicenter for politics centered around these issues. The result will be seen as a national verdict on the efficacy of this political approach versus the BJP's focus on development, nationalism, and welfare schemes (often termed the "double-engine" narrative).

If the Mahagathbandhan wins or performs exceptionally well, it will be viewed as an endorsement of their aggressive "vote theft" (e.g., the SIR issue raised in your text) and disenfranchisement narrative against the incumbent, making it a viable plank for the opposition in future state and national contests.

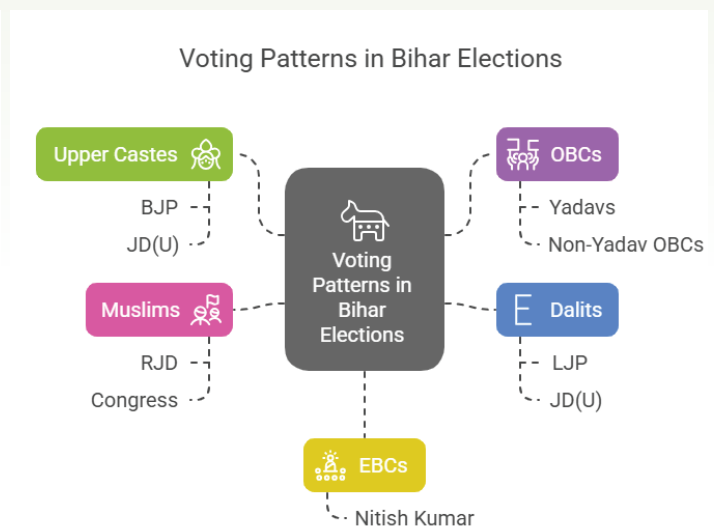
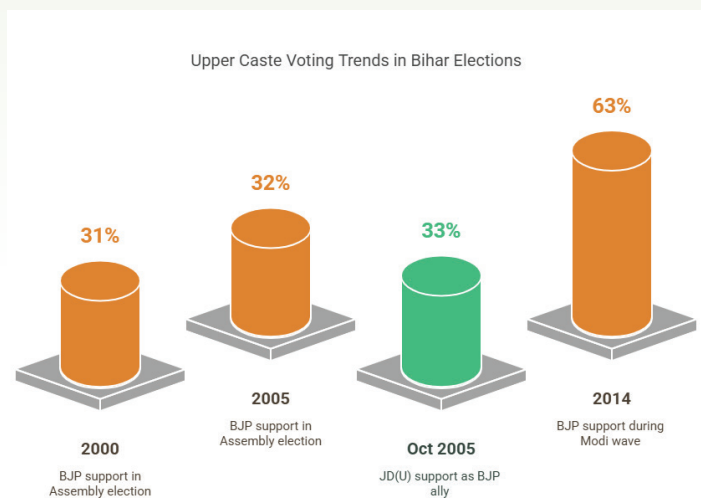
The success or failure of the Mahagathbandhan's seat-sharing arrangement and campaign coordination will serve as a blueprint (or a cautionary tale) for the national INDIA bloc in other states. The cohesion (or friction) between the RJD, Congress, and Left parties will be analyzed by other state units planning to take on the BJP.

The election is a major test for regional leaders like Tejashwi Yadav (Mahagathbandhan's likely face) and Nitish Kumar (NDA's veteran leader). Their performance will determine their future relevance and potential as national figures.

The BJP's performance is a test of its ability to transition from relying heavily on an alliance with the JD(U) to potentially grooming its own leadership in the state, while still managing the complex demands of its smaller coalition partners (like LJP (Ram Vilas) and HAM).

For the Congress, a stronger performance than in previous elections would provide a much-needed shot in the arm and allow it to demand a larger share of seats in future state alliances, boosting its claim as the principal opposition party. In short, Bihar is not just a provincial election; it is a political laboratory that will likely shape the strategies, narratives, and confidence levels of both the ruling dispensation and the opposition alliance at the national level.

(Author, a former JNU researcher, is a senior bi-lingual journalist. He has authored two books on politics, society and resistance issues in Bihar.)



# Bihar Must Exit Freebie Trap,

## AIM FOR VIKSIT FUTURE BY 2028



**Shivaji Sarkar**

Bihar's 2025 elections are shaping up as a decisive moment for the state's future. Once again, the political narrative is dominated by promises of cash transfers, subsidies, and giveaways. It's being interpreted as bribe as well. Yet, beneath the loud talk of welfare lies an uneasy truth — Bihar's real problems remain unsolved. Bihar is in hurry. None knows the wisdom of setting 2047 for its development – that's over two decades later.

**Can't it be in three years?:** Unemployment is high, industries are scarce, and migration continues unchecked, World Bank mentions in its various reports. Young graduates, unable to find work at home, still board trains to Delhi and Mumbai in search of a livelihood. The state's growth story has stalled because politics has been reduced to short-term appeasement rather than long-term planning. If Bihar is to break free from this cycle, political parties must shift focus — from freebies to factories, from subsidies to skills, and from caste arithmetic to capital investment. A difficult job in an adverse situation.

Every election, Bihar's leaders announce giveaways that sound generous but come with a heavy cost. Subsidies for electricity, farm loans, or direct cash transfers may provide relief — but they do not build capacity. Lacking vision, they

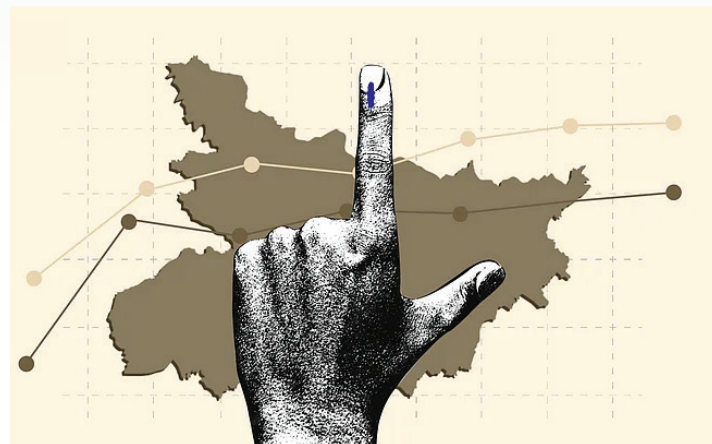
do not create jobs, factories, or self-sustaining growth. The state's dependency on central grants and outmigration continues because its political imagination has stalled.

**Freebies have become a substitute for governance — a political shortcut that delays the inevitable need for reform.**

The Rs 10,000 to each woman in the state, announced by Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar needs at least Rs 7,500 crore taxpayers' money for the first instalment. Mockingly it is said pick up from one to pay the other. There are other freebies that cost Rs 33000 crore.

It is no easy to manage with one of the highest debt ratio. Recent reports from NITI Aayog show Bihar's debt-to-GSDP ratio at 39.6 percent in 2022-23, higher than the median state. The Bihar government's anticipated public debt for the financial year 2025-26 is estimated at t Rs 3,53,819.11 crore. The debt has reportedly touched Rs 4.06 lakh crore.

The incumbent National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by Nitish Kumar's JD(U) and the BJP, is defending its governance record, highlighting past job creation (claiming 10 lakh jobs and 40 lakh employment opportunities provided) and various central and state welfare schemes.





The Opposition (Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)-led INDIA bloc) is not behind. Tejashwi Yadav has promised to bring a law to ensure a government job for at least one member in every household if the alliance is voted to power. He also pledged 10 lakh government jobs, an unemployment allowance, and a domicile-based job policy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently launched several youth-focused initiatives and transferred funds to women's accounts, which the BJP hopes will translate into votes. Other players like political strategist Prashant Kishor, through his Jan Suraj campaign, has also focused on issues of employment, education, and governance, aiming to attract disillusioned voters. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has also entered the fray, promising to implement its Delhi-Punjab model of governance focused on education and healthcare.

**Vote Management:** Vote management is the key issue. But the realities are different. While official unemployment rates (around 3-5 percent) might appear standard, these figures are misleading. The true picture reveals a very low Worker Population Ratio (WPR) (around 51.6 percent for ages 15 and above) and low labour force participation, indicating a large portion of the working-age population is neither employed nor actively seeking work, often due to a lack of available opportunities. Only 8.7 percent of workers are in regular wage/salaried jobs, the lowest in the country. Bihar has historically been one of India's poorer states, with millions still living in poverty. The lack of formal jobs and industries within the state forces thousands of skilled professionals and labourers to migrate. Addressing this outmigration is a major plank for opposition parties.

**World Bank's Diagnosis:** World Bank (WB) studies over two decades paint a sobering picture of Bihar's persistent structural weaknesses — poverty, inequality, weak governance, and poor infrastructure — that continue to constrain growth. Despite visible progress since 2005, Bihar remains one of India's poorest states, with rural poverty and consumption inequality showing little improvement. Infrastructure gaps like health or education lag behind national standards, reinforcing the cycle of backwardness.

The World Bank recommends boosting Bihar's agri-

cultural efficiency through better irrigation, climate-smart farming, crop diversification, and improved market access to raise farmer incomes. It also stresses expanding rural livelihoods—especially for women, and strengthening human capital through greater investment in health, education, and social protection. It has flagged governance and a lingering negative image that discourage investment.

Some interventions like flood management—through the Kosi Basin Development Project—and targeted reforms in education, health, and public finance have supported poverty reduction and improved resilience. The state needs sustained institutional reform and inclusive growth strategies. The NITI Aayog hasn't issued a separate vision document for Bihar but drives development through key initiatives like the Aspirational Districts and Blocks Programmes, targeting health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure in each district.

**Republic of Bihar:** Bihar is like the proverbial elephant to the blind. It's known as the cradle of Indian republic. Few realise that Bihar itself remains a republic unto its own. Improving the state and its people requires detailed study of the state, its people, varied regions, culture and prescription targeted to the state alone. Migration is almost a 200-year problem for its poverty, lack of opportunities and crime. Munger, for instance, is known for its gun-making culture since the time of Mir Qasim. It cannot be wished away as a law-and-order problem. The skill of the locals has to be recognised and the industry reorganised may be for an international market of "swadeshi" fancy arms. Similar out of the box solutions could turn Bihar into building a self-sustaining economy.

Political parties have to learn to float ideas if they really want to lead. The government mechanisms have to come out of their "file remarks", if the state has to be a change agent.

And finally, the country or Bihar needs a closer date for development say around 2028 for Vikasit Bharat and certainly not 2047, when most of those in Bihar today would not be there.

(Author, a veteran journalist, has served as the Dean of IIMC, New Delhi.)

## Bihar 2025: Will Youth Decide the Future?





# The Supreme Court's Scrutiny of ECI's SIR Exercise: **A Critical Examination**

Dr. K. Ranjan Sharma



The Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Bihar's electoral rolls, notified on June 24, 2025, marked the first such

exercise since 2003, ostensibly to purge inaccuracies like deceased voters, duplicates, and migrants ahead of the November 2025 Assembly elections.

**Genesis of the Controversy: ECI's SIR Notification and Initial Challenges:** With Bihar's rolls already updated via a Summary Revision (SSR) in January 2025—post-2024 Lok Sabha polls—the timing raised red flags. Petitioners, including the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), activist Yogendra Yadav, and MPs from RJD, Congress, and others, filed writs under Article 32, alleging the SIR was a "afresh" roll preparation disguised as revision, risking mass disenfranchisement of 7.89 crore voters, particularly marginalized groups like women migrants and minorities. Critically, the SIR's mechan-

ics—house-to-house verification by Booth Level Officers (BLOs) requiring 11 "indicative" documents for proof—were faulted for impracticality in a low-literacy, migrant-heavy state. Only 3.05% of Biharis had birth certificates, one key document, aggravating exclusion. Petitioners invoked Articles 14 (equality), 19 (freedoms), 21 (life/liberty), and 326 (adult suffrage), arguing the ECI overstepped its mandate under Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, by probing citizenship—a Home Ministry domain—without due process.

The 90-day timeline, from June to September, was deemed rushed, potentially violating natural justice by enabling arbitrary BLO deletions without prior notice or hearings. The Supreme Court, led by Justices Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi, admitted the petitions on July 7, 2025, framing issues: ECI's SIR powers, procedural legality, and election-year timing. On July 10, it refused a stay but prima facie endorsed Aadhaar, Voter ID (EPIC), and ration cards as proofs, questioning why a fresh SIR followed the January update. ECI's counsel, Rakesh Dwivedi, defended it as a "harmonious" multi-stakeholder process involving Booth Level Agents (BLAs) from parties, dismissing fears as "speculative." Yet, this early leniency overlooked ground realities: BLOs reportedly pre-filled forms, leading to errors like marking live voters as dead.

**Escalation: The 65 Lakh Deletions and Transparency Imperative:** By July 25, ECI's press note revealed





~65 lakh deletions from the base roll: 22 lakh deceased, 36 lakh shifted/absent, 7 lakh duplicates. The draft roll, published August 1, shrank to 7.24 crore, sparking outrage. Opposition leaders like Rahul Gandhi highlighted anomalies, e.g., centenarian women "resurrected" as dead, fueling "vote theft" narratives. ADR's August 8 application demanded publication of deleted names, arguing non-searchable rolls hid irregularities. Hearings intensified August 12-14. Kapil Sibal (for RJD MP Manoj Jha) called deletions "unlawful" sans objections, while Prashant Bhushan accused BLO malfeasance. The Bench invoked the "little man" doctrine from Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner (1978), stressing

enquiries before deletions.

On August 14, in a pivotal interim order, it mandated ECI to upload a searchable, booth-wise list of the 65 lakh by August 19, with reasons (death/shift/duplication), publicized via media. Aadhaar was formalized as the 12th proof, a win for accessibility, as it covers 90%+ Biharis versus sparse alternatives like passports. This order was a critical rebuke to ECI's opacity, aligning with Lal Babu Hussein v. Electoral Registration Officer (1995), which safeguards recent rolls. ECI complied swiftly—uploading within 56 hours by August 17—revealing 36 lakh shifts, 22 lakh deaths. CEC Gyanesh Kumar urged claims till September 1, but petitioners critiqued the for-

**Bihar's electoral roll shows 72.4 million electors, 8% less than before the Special Intensive Revision, marking a rare decline in registered voters.**

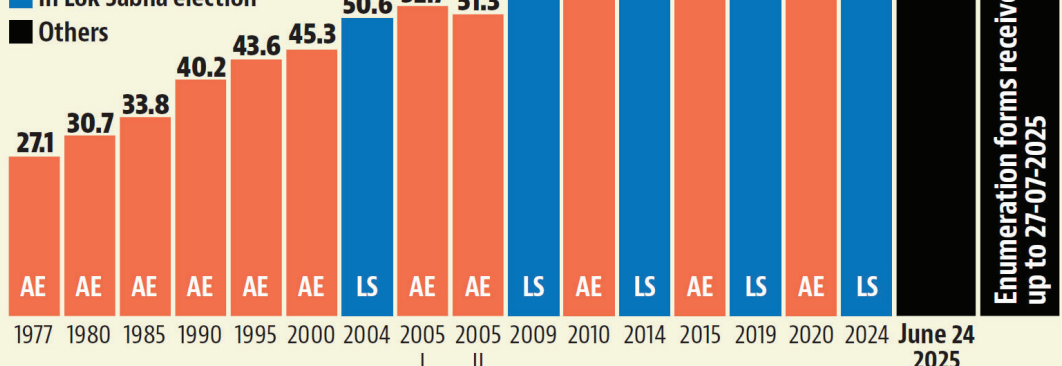
## Tracking voters over the years

Registered electors increased in Bihar between consecutive elections, except in 2005.

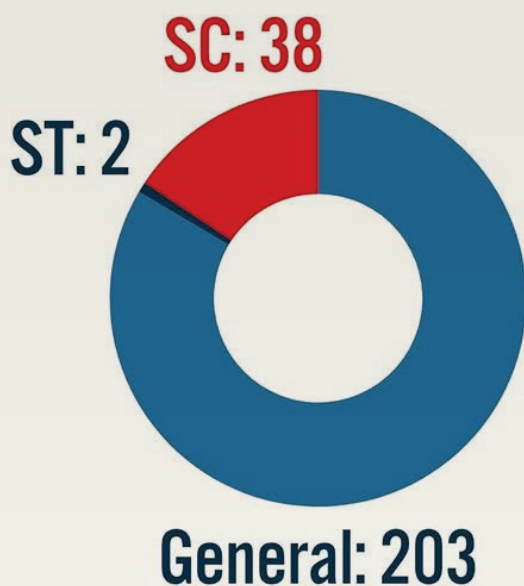
### Electors registered in Bihar

(in million)

- In assembly election
- In Lok Sabha election
- Others



# Bihar Election 2025



No. of Constituencies  
**243**

Total Voters  
**7.43 crore**

Polling Stations  
**90,712**

Male voters

**3.92 crore**

Female voters

**3.50 crore**

Young voters (20-29)

**1.63 crore**

First time voters (18-19)

**14.01 lakh**

*Source: ECI*

*Details as on Sept 30, 2025*

mat: non-searchable by name (only EPIC), burdensome for illiterate voters. On August 22, the Court expressed "surprise" at parties' inaction—only two objections filed despite 85,000 additions—deeming the 11+1 documents "voter-friendly" but probing low engagement.

**Post-Draft Developments: Claims, Floods, and Procedural Tweaks:** The claims window (August

1-September 1) saw surges: over 1 lakh in the last week, amid floods delaying filings. On September 1, RJD/AIMIM sought extension to September 15; the Court granted it till nomination day, clarifying post-deadline claims under the June 24 order. ECI's affidavit assured no deletions without notice/hearing/reasoned orders, deploying 2.5 lakh volunteers.



Yet, Congress claimed 89 lakh rejected complaints, highlighting systemic rejection. On September 8, the Court reinforced Aadhaar's validity, rebuking BLOs' refusals and ECI penalties on officers accepting it. September 15 fixed October 7 for final arguments, presuming ECI's constitutional compliance but warning of nullification if illegal. This balanced approach critiqued ECI's decentralization as prone to local biases, yet upheld its Article 324 autonomy.

**Culmination and October 2025 Status: Final Rolls and Lingering Doubts:** ECI published final rolls on September 30: 7.42 crore voters, a 47 lakh net drop (65 lakh draft deletions minus 21.5 lakh additions, mostly new 18-year-olds, plus 3.66 lakh final exclusions). Permanent migration dominated deletions (55%), but female exclusions—via unaddressed marriage migration—drew ire for gender bias. On October 7—post-poll schedule announcement (polls from November 6)—the Court grilled ECI on the 3.66 lakh final deletions' notices, calling it a "prerogative" but demanding details by October 9 (3:30-4 PM), with detailed hearing on October 14.

Bhushan flagged non-transparency: "ECI published 65 lakh only after court force," demanding January vs. final comparisons. ECI retorted with no individual appeals, only "Delhi NGOs/politicians" complained; parties were "satisfied." The Bench noted "confusion" on additions (re-inclusions or new?), urging affidavits from affected voters. The October 9 hearing (rescheduled slot) saw the Court emphasize transparency as a "hallmark of open democracy," questioning ECI on non-citizen removals and individual details of additions, while Congress accused ECI of lacking integrity in disclosing such figures. ECI was directed to furnish specifics on the 3.66 lakh exclusions, reinforcing no blanket directives would issue to avoid interfering with its autonomy under Article 324.

The October 14 detailed hearing, as listed, featured pointed arguments: Petitioners, via Bhushan and ADR, highlighted anomalies like 45,000 "gibberish" names and over 4 lakh entries with house number "0," urging a January-to-final comparison "in the click of a button" to expose irregularities. Justice Kant queried the locus: "For whom are the petitioners doing this?" noting "aliens" (non-citizens) unlikely to complain, and suggested focusing on one constituency for deletions.

The Bench justified SIR's necessity, citing Bihar's voter rolls exceeding adult population by 107% historically, but declined a blanket reinstatement order, instead directing the Bihar State Legal Services Authority (BSLSA) to assist excluded voters in filing appeals with ECI via district bodies and para-legal volunteers. ECI maintained no individual complaints received, attributing low appeals to satisfaction, while petitioners decried delayed legal aid (only post-order) and unreleased exclusion lists as barriers. The Court warned against misleading affidavits, slamming ADR for potential falsehoods, and posted the matter for further orders, underscoring procedural equity without halting polls.

**Supreme Court Hearing on Bihar SIR: October**

**14:** On October 14, 2025, the Supreme Court bench of Justices Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi conducted the detailed hearing on petitions challenging the Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Bihar's electoral rolls. Petitioners, including ADR and Prashant Bhushan, highlighted anomalies in the final rolls—7.42 crore voters post-47 lakh net deletions—such as 45,000 "gibberish" names and over 4 lakh entries with "house number 0." They demanded a "click-of-a-button" comparison with January 2025 rolls and release of the 3.66 lakh final exclusions list, accusing ECI of opacity and BLO malfeasance.

Justice Kant questioned petitioners' locus: "For whom are you doing this? Aliens won't complain." The bench justified SIR's necessity, citing Bihar's bloated rolls (107% of adult population), but declined blanket reinstatement. Instead, it directed the Bihar State Legal Services Authority (BSLSA) to provide free legal aid, para-legal volunteers, and district-level assistance for excluded voters to file appeals with ECI, ensuring contact lists for every village. ECI maintained no individual complaints, only "Delhi NGOs," and insisted notices were served, disputing petitioners' affidavits as misleading. The court warned against false submissions and posted the matter for October 16, balancing ECI autonomy under Article 324 with voter equity. No stay on polls (November 6-11)

**Critical Assessment: Balancing Autonomy and Accountability:** The SIR saga exposes ECI's dual role: innovator in scale (7.42 crore voters) yet vulnerable to perceptions of partisanship in BJP-ruled Bihar, where deletions hit Muslim/women-heavy districts. The Court's interventions—transparency mandates, Aadhaar inclusion, and now appeal assistance—mitigated disenfranchisement, upholding *Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms* (2002) on voter rights. However, its reluctance to stay the process or issue blanket relief deferred root scrutiny, allowing 7% roll shrinkage potentially tilting polls, while rebuking petitioners for overreach risks eroding public trust in challenges. ECI's "no complaints" claim rings hollow against 89 lakh rejections, protests like RJD's "Voter Adhikar Yatra," and fresh allegations of gibberish (mumbo jumbo) entries.

However, the Supreme Court's October 14, 2025, hearing on Bihar's SIR reflects a cautious balance between ECI's autonomy and voter rights. By rejecting blanket reinstatement and questioning petitioners' locus, the Court upheld ECI's mandate while addressing transparency concerns through mandated legal aid via BSLSA. Additionally, its reluctance to probe deeper into alleged anomalies like "gibberish" entries or enforce pre-deletion notices risks perpetuating distrust, potentially undermining electoral integrity as Bihar's polls approach. A final verdict must enforce SOPs for deletions, audit biases (e.g., non-citizen data), and mandate pre-notice protocols to restore faith; else, it risks validating "electoral autocracy" fears.

(Author, a JNU PhD, is a senior editorial adviser to EW.)



# Ambassador Sergio Gor's Early India Visit Signals U.S. Priority to Repair Strategic Ties

D. K. Dubey

Mr. Sergio Gor, who was recently confirmed as the U.S. Ambassador to India and Special Envoy for South and Central Asia, met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday, October 11, during a pre-official visit to New Delhi.

This was within a week of his Senate confirmation that happened on October 7. Gor's visit from October 9-14 was a familiarisation trip and a diplomatic outreach before he formally takes charge and presents his credentials as Ambassador. He traveled in his capacity as the Special Envoy for South and Central Asia. The meeting was framed as a positive sign amid recent "rocky relations" and followed a phone call between PM Modi and President Trump. Modi posted on social media that he was confident Gor's tenure would strengthen the India-

U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership.

During his six-day visit, Gor also met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal and other senior Indian officials.

The visit came ahead of a possible meeting between PM Modi and President Trump on the sidelines of the upcoming ASEAN-related summits in Kuala Lumpur (October 26-27) where a bilateral meeting is being explored to "repair ties" and push trade talks forward.

**Much Awaited Senate Confirmation of Two Top Diplomats in the Region:** The long-anticipated confirmation of key U.S. diplomats to South Asia is set to inject a much-needed boost into the rocky India-U.S. engagement. After months of significant strain, the U.S. Senate approved two crucial nominations in a single, condensed vote: Sergio Gor as the Ambassador of the United States to India, and S. Paul Kapur, an American of Indian origin, as the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia. The confirmation, which passed with 51 Senators in favor and 47 against despite the government shutdown, signals Washington's intent to re-engage with



New Delhi.

Mr. Gor's mandate is uniquely powerful, as he was also appointed as U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy for South and Central Asia, a new and high-profile post that did not require Senate confirmation. His early activities in this role have been closely monitored and viewed with some misgivings in New Delhi, particularly after he met with leaders of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan in New York last month, during the same period that Pakistani leadership was visiting Washington.

Although there is still no official indication when Mr. Gor will formally take up his Ambassadorial post in Delhi, it's expected that he will be joining the U.S. Mission before the November QUAD Summit in New Delhi. This is also believed that he will also be playing a crucial role coordinating with MEA officials in setting up a bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump on the sidelines of the upcoming ASEAN summits in Kuala Lumpur in last week of this month. Such a meeting is seen as a key opportunity for the two leaders to repair ties and discuss scheduling the next Quad summit.

**Key Goals to be Accomplished:** At his Senate hearing on September 11, Mr. Gor, who described the U.S.-India relationship as one that would "define the 21st century," laid out his primary diplomatic tasks. One of his top priorities is to advance the bilateral trade relationship to ensure it is "fair" to American businesses. He specifically challenged New Delhi, stating that "India's protectionist policies and regulatory barriers have prevented [the two countries] from fully realising this partnership."

The second major task articulated by the new Ambassador-designate revolves around geopolitical alignment and energy. Mr. Gor explicitly stated that "getting" India to stop buying Russian oil is a "top priority" for his tenure. This public declaration underscores Washington's desire to push India away from its long-standing defense and energy dependence on Moscow, adding a specific and sensitive point of friction to the strategic dialogue.

The confirmed duo offers a contrasting blend of political connections and regional expertise. While Mr. Gor is a 38-year-old close Trump aide and MAGA insider with no prior experience on India, Mr. Kapur who is Delhi-born, is a well-known figure in South Block and a seasoned analyst. Kapur is a respected South Asia scholar who has authored several books on Pakistan-sponsored jihadist groups and U.S.-India relations, and previously served in the State Department's policy planning division, making him a knowledgeable point-person for New Delhi's security concerns.

Their appointments come at a critical juncture, with their tasks "cut out for them" due to the downturn in bilateral ties over the past several months. The specific policy issues driving the friction include the U.S.'s imposition of 50% tariffs on Indian goods, sanctions related to Russian oil imports and the Chabahar port, a \$100,000 fee for H-1B immigrant visas, and a crackdown on students and subsequent deportations.



**Prospects of a Significant Thaw:** Despite these significant policy disagreements, recent weeks have shown signs of a potential thaw and diplomatic outreach. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Mr. Gor in New York, and trade negotiators resumed dialogue aimed at establishing a free trade agreement. These collaborative steps indicate a shared recognition that the partnership is too vital to allow the disputes to derail it entirely.

The primary source of political strain, however, remains President Trump's repeated, public claim—made over 40 times, including in the preceding week—that he has been asked to mediate the India-Pakistan conflict, threatening to use trade ties as leverage to avert a "nuclear war."

The Ministry of External Affairs has been forced to strenuously deny this assertion, which is reportedly part of a broader campaign by the U.S. government to secure a Nobel Peace Prize for the President.

The confirmation vote was widely seen by analysts as a significant diplomatic signal that the U.S.-India relationship is a top priority for the administration. Mukesh Aghi of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) referred to Gor as a "trusted confidante" of President Trump and Kapur as a "stellar academic" with unparalleled understanding of regional security, concluding that together, the new team is ready to "iron out the creases and reach consensus."



# Remembering Ratan Tata on His First “Punya Tithi”



**Er. Vinay Tiwari**

Ratan Naval Tata (1937–2024) was an iconic Indian industrialist, philanthropist, and former chairman of the Tata Group, leaving behind a monumental legacy in business, ethics, and social responsibility.

He was the Chairman of the Tata Group: He served as the chairman of Tata Sons from 1991 to 2012, transforming the largely India-centric conglomerate into a global business powerhouse. Under his leadership, the group's revenues grew significantly, and its international presence expanded dramatically.

He spearheaded several landmark international acquisitions, including:

- Tetley Tea (2000)
- Corus Group (now Tata Steel Europe) (2007)
- Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) (2008), which turned around to become a significant profit driver for Tata Motors.
- Visionary Products: He is known for his vision in launching:
  - The Tata Indica (1998), India's first indigenously designed passenger car.
  - The Tata Nano (2008), conceptualized as the "People's Car" to be the world's most affordable car, fulfilling his desire to provide a safe, affordable option for Indian families traveling on two-wheelers.

**Ethical Leadership and Philanthropy:** Ratan Tata was revered for his commitment to ethical business practices and corporate social responsibility. A significant portion of the Tata Group's ownership is held by Tata Trusts,



which Ratan Tata led for many years, channeling substantial funds into social causes like education, healthcare, and rural development across India.

**Post-Retirement Activities:** After stepping down as chairman, he remained actively involved as Chairman Emeritus of Tata Sons and Tata Group, and became a prominent investor and mentor in India's startup ecosystem. He received some of India's highest civilian honors, including the Padma Bhushan (2000) and the Padma Vibhushan (2008).

His leadership style was characterized by humility, integrity, and a deep commitment to the welfare of his employees and the nation. He is widely regarded as one of India's most influential and respected business leaders.

Ratan Tata was a unique business leader primarily because he perfectly balanced bold, visionary global ambition with an unwavering commitment to ethical integrity and social purpose.

**His distinctiveness can be summarized through three core qualities:**

**Business Ethics Over Profit:** Ratan Tata was the torchbearer of the Tata Group's founding philosophy, which holds that business is a means to serve society, not just shareholders.

He famously refused to compromise on ethics, even when faced with significant business challenges, setting a gold standard for corporate governance in India.

**Social Purpose as Core Strategy:** He ensured that a substantial portion of the group's wealth—held by the Tata Trusts—was channeled into philanthropy, actively funding and driving initiatives in education, healthcare, and rural development. His principle was, "What comes from the people must go back to the people."

He was known for genuine empathy, prioritizing employee welfare over profits, notably by ensuring no major layoffs even during tough economic times and personally supporting employees affected by crises.

**Visionary Global Transformation:** Tata transformed the conglomerate from a largely domestic entity into a formidable global player, demonstrating a rare combination of strategic foresight and daring.

He spearheaded bold and successful international acquisitions like the British tea company Tetley and the luxury automotive brands Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), which many critics initially doubted but which became cornerstones of the group's global revenue.

He conceptualized and launched products that addressed the needs of the common person, most famously the Tata Nano—the world's cheapest car—driven by his vision to provide a safe, affordable vehicle for Indian families.

**His Humility and Resilience:** Despite his immense stature and success, his leadership was marked by a quiet, down-to-earth demeanor that fostered deep loyalty. He started his career on the shop floor of Tata Steel and maintained an accessible, unpretentious persona throughout his career.

His resilience was evident when he leveraged the



**Ratan Tata**

**(December 28, 1937 to October 9, 2024)**

rejection and insult he faced from Ford in the late 1990s over the Tata Indica passenger car division, only to return years later to acquire Ford's iconic JLR brands. He famously said, "I don't believe in taking right decisions. I take decisions and then make them right."

**Bharat Ratna for Ratan Tata:** The demand to confer the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, upon Ratan Tata is a sentiment widely and frequently expressed by the Indian public, politicians, and business leaders.

In 2021, when the hashtag #BharatRatnaForRatanTata began trending heavily on social media, Ratan Tata humbly requested that the campaigns be discontinued. He stated:

"While I appreciate the sentiments expressed by a section of the social media in terms of an award, I would humbly like to request that such campaigns be discontinued. Instead, I consider myself fortunate to be an Indian and to try and contribute to India's growth and prosperity." Following his passing, there have been renewed and growing calls, including formal requests from some political groups, for the government to confer the award upon him posthumously.

**(Author is Managing Director of BP Services, an NCR-based medical education NGO, and regular EW columnist.)**



# A Diplomatic Shift

## Taliban Minister Muttaqi Visits India



**Adib Mustafa**

The visit of Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban's acting Foreign Minister, to India marks a landmark shift in diplomatic relations between the two parties. This week-long trip is the first ministerial-level engagement since the Taliban took power in August 2021, and it follows a temporary travel exemption granted by the UN Security Council. Muttaqi, welcomed by India's Ministry of External Affairs, is holding high-level meetings with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, alongside cultural visits.

This engagement signals a massive, albeit cautious, diplomatic shift in India's approach. Previously, India had been a major ally and financial supporter of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, committing \$3 billion to reconstruction. New Delhi was slow to open channels with the Taliban, and while it has not formally recognized the regime, this visit—following only one prior telephonic interaction—demonstrates a strong intent to deal with the de-facto rulers.

Muttaqi's journey to Delhi follows his participation in the Moscow Format of talks on Afghanistan, where he led a delegation for the first time. The consultation included representatives from numerous regional powers, including the Indian Ambassador to Russia, and resulted in a joint statement. The participants reaffirmed support for an independent, peaceful Afghan state and stressed the importance of strengthening counter-terrorism cooperation.

The joint statement from the Moscow talks emphasized two critical points. First, it highlighted the aim to develop regional economic projects with Afghan participation and actively integrate Afghanistan into the regional connectivity system. This shows a unified regional determination to build ties with the Taliban-ruled state.





Second, the statement deemed it "unacceptable" for countries to deploy their military infrastructure in Afghanistan or neighboring states, clearly reflecting the opposition of regional players to any extra-regional presence. This was a thinly veiled reference to President Donald Trump's demand for the Taliban to hand over the strategic Bagram air base.

India's decision to join this statement is crucial, as it aligns New Delhi with the regional approach and explicitly conveys its opposition to a renewed US presence in Afghanistan.

This represents a significant break from India's past Afghan policy, which often aligned with the interests of the US and NATO, particularly due to the historical threat posed by the Taliban's close ties to the Pakistani ISI and groups like Al Qaeda.

The shift in regional policy is largely driven by the shared security risk posed by the emergence of Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISIS-KP), which has attacked Russia, Iran, and Afghanistan. Countries from Russia to China and Uzbekistan have come to recognize the Taliban as a necessary partner in countering this threat, which the Taliban itself is actively battling.

The recognition of the Taliban is underpinned by three main pillars: regional security (countering ISIS-KP), trade and connectivity (leveraging Afghanistan's geostrategic location), and geopolitics (preempting the region from becoming a base for Western powers).

The "new" Taliban is actively seeking investors and has repeatedly pledged to prevent its territory from being used as a launchpad for attacks on other states. India's policy is now about playing it safe and pursuing a regional



approach to protect its strategic interests while hedging against internal threats.

The dependence on the Taliban for trade routes to Central Asia, such as via the Chabahar Port, and the need to neutralize any threat amidst renewed US-Pakistan alignment, makes engagement imperative.

Despite the strategic necessity, India's engagement is cautious due to persistent grey areas, namely internal rifts within the Taliban organization and its domestic policies towards women and minorities. India intends to continue providing humanitarian aid and capacity-building assistance, hoping to leverage this relationship to encourage the regime to rethink its controversial domestic governance.

(Author is Manager, Collaboration, at MPower, an initiative of Aditya Birla Education Trust, Mumbai.)



# What Takaichi's Premiership means for Japanese Foreign Policy?



**Abhijitha Singh**

The other day, Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party elected Takaichi Sanae as its new leader. Now the Diet is expected to confirm her as prime minister. One cannot be sure if and how the Japanese Parliament would go about this business and elect her so. Takaichi's LDP has only 196 seats in the House. She needs the support of another 37 members of Parliament to form a government.

The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan has 148 seats in the lower House, Nippon Ishin no Kai 35, the Democratic Party for the People 27, Komeito 24, Reiwa Shinsengumi 9, Japanese Communist Party 8 and others 13. The LDP's traditional coalition junior partner Komeito has of late withdrawn itself from the alliance. Reports are that the Constitutional Democratic Party, Komeito, Nip-

pon Ishin no Kai, and the Japanese Communist Party have ganged up to pit DPP leader Tamaki Yuichiro as a common Opposition candidate against Takaichi in the possible upcoming prime-ministerial race in Japanese Parliament.

One can only hope Takaichi would manage the show in her parliament and emerge triumphant to be the country's next premier. She is a seasoned politician in Japan.

She is fully conversant with the tricks of the trade called politics. She joined the LDP in 1996. Since then, she has been elected as an MP 10 times. She has also held senior government roles, including of the minister for economic security, the state minister for trade and industry, and the minister for internal affairs and communications.

Today she is firmly in the saddle in the LDP. She has the support of



former Japanese Prime Minister Aso Taro, grandson of former Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, who is now the LDP's vice president. Aso's brother-in-law Suzuki Shunichi, the son of former Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko, is secretary-general of the party. Aso and Suzuki are said to be lobbying very hard for the political support Takashia needs to form the next government in Japan.

One, however, is sure that, if confirmed as the country's next Prime Minister, she would fiercely advance a hawkish foreign policy agenda. The reasons for such an inference are not far to seek. Her role model in politics is said to have been Britain's "Iron Lady" Margaret Thatcher.

Takaichi has had old-fashioned views on women and gender equality. She supports the imperial family's male-only succession. She sees in the demand of equal pay for men and women a threat to traditional family values. She supports a 19th-century civil law on female surnames. Recently, she has called for tougher policies on immigration.

Takaichi has long been known as a history revisionist and China hawk. She spent her formative years of politics in the Seiwakai faction of the LDP under the leadership of former Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro who led the Seiwakai from 1999-2000 & again from 2001-2006. Her stance vis-a-vis wartime history and Chinese expansionism is a derivative from this period only.

It may be recalled that in 2004, Takaichi justified Japan's role during its imperial rule. She said that Tokyo had to wage "a defensive war" during the period. She has been known as an arch nationalist. Once she called for the burning of the Japanese flag to be made a criminal offense. As an interior minister under then-Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, she threatened television stations with the revocation of their licenses if they did not toe the government's nationalist lines.

Takaichi seems to be fully aware that the strategic thinking of Abe has had an indelible imprint on the successive administrations in the country. Pertinently, the Abe administration reinterpreted the pacifist Japanese Constitution so as to equip the country with the right to collective self-defense. As a result, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces can now fight back if even if there is an attack on a country Japan is close to.

Prime Minister Abe realised very early that China needs to be countered in order to ensure "a free and open Indo-Pacific" and, for this, Tokyo must cultivate multiple ties with the countries in the region. In his "Confluence of the Two Seas" speech to the Indian Parliament in August 2007, Abe made a case to connect the Pacific and Indian Oceans through an "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity."

In harmony with the central ideas of Abe, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's cabinet approved the "Three Security Documents." It increased the defence budget to 2 per cent of the gross domestic product. Last year,



Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru, in his piece to the famous US think tank Hudson Institute argued for "an Asian version of NATO" to "deter China."

Takaichi has already been known as a close ally of Abe. Like Abe, she is in favour of revising Japan's pacifist constitution, especially Article 9, which renounced Japan's right to wage war. She has already called for easing constitutional restrictions on the country's Self-Defence Forces.

Given the background and orientation of Takaichi, one thinks, she might initiate hard in the near future to engage democratic nations, including the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Thailand and lobby in the QUAD forum to bring them aboard the "Asian NATO" forum. The countries in the region are likely to be receptive to Japan's idea. They all perceive the threat from the dragon in one of the other forms. They may be interested in a collective defense Pact to develop the right kind of weapons and operational concepts to thwart the potential China threat.

One also thinks Takaichi might take steps also to rope in the US and South Korea more firmly in building the architecture of the Indo-Pacific Command. Time seems to be ripe for this today. It was US President Donald J Trump who renamed the US Pacific as the Indo-Pacific Command.

**(The author is a doctoral scholar at the Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, JNU.)**



# Trump's Deal Ends the Conflict

## Will it Ensure Peace in the Middle East?



**Zaheer Mustafa**

US President Donald Trump delivered a triumphant speech to the Israeli Knesset hours after the release

of the 20 remaining hostages, a key provision of the US-brokered ceasefire with Hamas. He hailed the agreement, which followed two years of devastating war in Gaza, as a monumental achievement, declaring that "the long and painful nightmare is finally over" and that the world was witnessing the "historic dawn of a new Middle East." The President received a hero's welcome, marked by repeated standing ovations, cheers, and even a Nobel Peace Prize nomination from the Knesset Speaker.

Trump credited the diplomatic success to both American efforts and the cooperation of Arab and Muslim nations that came together to pressure Hamas. He used the occasion to commend Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, thanking him with "Great job" and acknowledging his toughness: "He's not easy to deal with, but that's what makes him great." In a lighter moment, he advised Netanyahu, "Now you can be a bit nicer, Bibi, because you're not at war," while praising his courage to end the conflict.

The US President once again touted his foreign policy record, repeating his claim of stopping eight wars and contrasting his actions with the aggressive personality critics had ascribed to him. However, his speech was briefly interrupted by two lawmakers, Aymen Odeh and Ofer Cassif, one of whom held up a sign reading "genocide" before they were quickly removed by security.

Remembering the victims of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack, Trump pledged "Never forget, and never again." He also extended a conciliatory "hand of friendship and cooperation" to Iran, despite earlier military conflict, claiming the country was ready to make a peace deal. The larger goal, he emphasized, was a region that could live in "peace for all eternity," free from looming threats.

Following his address to the Israeli parliament, and a stopover in Israel, Trump arrived at Sharm el-Sheikh to sign the Gaza Peace Agreement with the leaders of Egypt, Qatar, and Türkiye.

Donald Trump and Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi led a summit with leaders from over 20 countries to discuss the future of Gaza and the broader Middle East. The ceasefire is intended to be accompanied by a crucial surge of humanitarian aid into the territory, which has



been largely destroyed and is facing famine after the two-year conflict.

**The Macabre Calculus: Israel's Search for Hostage Remains:** The immediate focus on the release of living Israeli hostages from Gaza under US President Donald Trump's 20-point peace plan is shadowed by a grim, parallel mission for Israel: the recovery of the remains of its dead held in the Palestinian territory. This mission has been a "sacred duty of communal responsibility" for Israel since the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack, which saw militants take 250 captives into Gaza.

**The Search for the Fallen:** Israel's efforts to find the bodies of deceased hostages have been extensive, and at times, controversial. Early in the Gaza war, a small commando unit was tasked with collecting samples from bodies encountered in Hamas's vast network of tunnels, anticipating that later DNA analysis might identify dead hostages. As the Israeli military took control of larger parts of the enclave, the search intensified. Human rights groups have documented Israeli bulldozers excavating at least four Palestinian cemeteries and hauling away hundreds of bodies for analysis, a tactic rooted in Israel's security doctrine that views recovering the fallen—at whatever cost—as a societal vow. This doctrine is exemplified by the military's ongoing mission to recover the remains of Mossad spy Eli Cohen, who was hanged in Damascus in 1965.

So far, Israel has found and retrieved the bodies of at least 50 hostages during the war, including six found hidden inside a false wall in Khan Younis in August 2024. Another eight bodies were released during earlier ceasefires.

**The work of these searches is divided between two dedicated Israeli military units:**

- Yashar: Responsible for retrieving the bodies of soldiers in the heat of combat.
- Eitan: Utilizes sophisticated algorithms to sift through terabytes of drone data to find evidence of recent graves.

**The Exchange of Remains:** The issue of the dead has long been a source of tension in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with both sides using the collection and exchange of remains as leverage. Under the terms of the Trump peace plan, Hamas is responsible for handing over the bodies of at least 28 deceased hostages alongside the living. In a "macabre calculus that mirrors the asymmetry of the war's casualties," Israel is to release the remains of 15 deceased Gazans for every one of the dead hostages returned.

While Hamas was expected to return all 20 living hostages, Israeli officials noted an understanding that not all the dead might be recovered immediately. To address this, an addendum to the agreement calls for the establishment of a special task force for deceased hostages led by Israeli brigadier Gal Hirsch. This task force is set to include Israeli, US, Egyptian, Turkish, and Qatari representatives, who will be responsible for locating the remaining bodies that Hamas cannot—or will not—find.

**Palestinian Bodies as Bargaining Chips:** As Israel works to recover its dead, it simultaneously holds a vast number of Palestinian bodies, which have become a form

of leverage in negotiations. According to media reports and the National Campaign for the Recovery of Martyr's Bodies, Israel holds as many as 2000 and possibly more, Palestinian bodies.

This total includes at least 726 from the occupied West Bank, most preceding the current war, which are buried in so-called "cemeteries of numbers." In these cemeteries, graves are identifiable only by a file kept by the military, denying families the knowledge of where their loved ones are interred.

Additionally, Israeli newspapers reported that Israel is holding at least 1,500 bodies from Gaza, frozen in morgues around the country, largely at the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute in Tel Aviv. The use of remains as bargaining chips has continued for years, exemplified by the nearly decade-long negotiation between Israel and Hamas over the bodies of two Israeli soldiers from the Gaza war, one of whom—Oron Shaul—was recently found and returned during the current conflict.

**The Context of the Ceasefire:** The expected release of the 20 living hostages, along with the remains of the 28 deceased, represents the first phase of the Trump plan to end the two-year war in Gaza. This moment is anticipated to be one of "joy mixed with sorrow for those lost" for Israel, and a "cathartic moment."

The ceasefire, which took effect on Friday, also brought relief to the over 2 million Gazans who have endured daily bombardment, mass displacement, and widespread starvation. Israel's retaliatory offensive has devastated the strip, resulting in the deaths of more than 67,000 Gazans, according to Palestinian health officials.

President Trump, who brokered the deal and declared "the war is over" before traveling to Israel, is being credited for pushing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas to halt the war. Qatar, Egypt, and Turkey also played crucial roles in convincing Hamas to agree.

**The 20-point peace plan, however, faces significant hurdles, particularly the second phase, which calls for:**

1. Hamas's disarmament.
2. A broader withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza.
3. An international stabilization force being deployed in the Palestinian territory.
4. The establishment of a Peace Committee to manage a postwar Gaza, to be chaired by Trump.

Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners have threatened to topple his administration if the conflict ends without Hamas's destruction, and the government has not committed to a full troop withdrawal. Similarly, Hamas has not agreed to disarm and has begun reasserting its power in parts of the strip. Despite these challenges, the release of the hostages is a momentous first step, providing the best chance so far of ending the war and laying the groundwork for a just resolution, which the plan states should include working towards a two-state solution to deliver security, peace, and justice to both Israelis and Palestinians.

(Author, a senior tri-lingual journalist, is a key editorial adviser to EW.)



# Turning Heroes to Villains

## A tragic tale of Ladakh's Sonam Wangchuk



**Dr Satish Misra**

Latest victim of the ruling ecosystem lording over the Indian nation is Ladakh's son of soil Sonam Wangchuk who by his sheer commitment and dedication to his land was the darling of all peace loving and environment protectionist people not only in the country but across the world.

Winner of Ramon Magasaysay award and several other prestigious honours for his work, Wangchuk was a sought-after figure by the very system till 24 September when protesting youth from Ladakh lost their patience on the delaying and tiring tactics of the central government and turned violent setting the BJP office in Leh on fire, is now trying to demonise and vilify him projecting him as an anti-national.

On 24 September, CRPF and Police opened fire at an assembly of protesters shooting them frontally on the body instead of aiming at legs following to Standard Op-

erating Procedure. Protesters had assembled in support of a hunger strike seeking special constitutional protections for Ladakh by a group of activists led by educator and innovator Wangchuk. The strike had entered its 15th day and the deteriorating condition of the participants had ignited passions.

The Leh Apex Body (LAB) youth wing had given a call for protest and shutdown after two of 15 people, who were on a 35-day hunger strike since September 10, were shifted to a hospital after their condition deteriorated on 23 September evening. The LAB, an independent organi-



sation that's been leading the protests, had warned that public patience was wearing thin but its warning fell on deaf ears of the powers in Delhi.

Protests were being held in support for their demands of Union of Territory of Ladakh being granted statehood, inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the formation of the Ladakh Public Service Commission and two parliamentary seats with four assembly seats for Ladakh. Talks were unnecessarily dragged with the intention of tiring the members of the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA). What has put oil into the simmering fire of anger among people is high unemployment which stands at 26.3% which is the second highest in the country after Andaman & Nicobar islands.

Notably, Wangchuk has been on a prolonged fast demanding full statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. His appeal has resonated widely, particularly among the youth, who accuse the Centre of not taking concrete steps on the issue. In fact, he had undertaken a march to Delhi to build up pressure on the Centre but he had to return as he was not allowed to hold a hunger strike in the Union capital. He went back and sat on the hunger strike again.

Reacting to the unrest, Wangchuk wrote on X, "VERY SAD EVENTS IN LEH. My message of peaceful path failed today. I appeal to youth to please stop this nonsense. This only damages our cause."

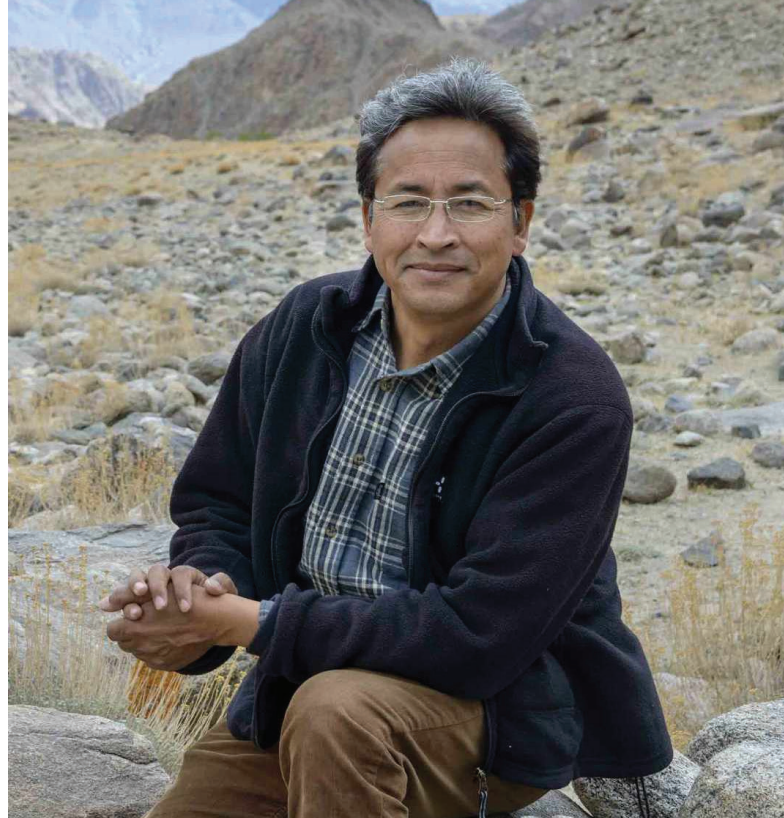
Protesters' demand is not merely for statehood but it extends to a wider set focused on preserving the unique character of the mostly tribal region with cold desert climate

Reacting to the MHA's statement, which had blamed him for provoking the mob violence on 24 September, Wangchuk said he is prepared to be arrested under the stringent Public Safety Act (PSA). "I see they are building up a case to bring me under the Public Safety Act and throw me in jail for two years," he told media that "I am ready for that, but Sonam Wangchuk in jail may cause them more problems than free Sonam Wangchuk." The climate activist also said, "To say it (the violence) was instigated by me, or sometimes by Congress, is to find a scapegoat, rather than addressing the core of the problem, and this will lead us nowhere.

"They may be clever in making somebody else a scapegoat, but they are not wise. At this time, we all need wisdom rather than 'cleverness' because youths are already frustrated," said Wangchuk.

Wangchuk said that by employing the "scapegoat tactic," the government is "not actually taking measures for peace," but instead taking steps that will "further aggravate" the situation by diverting attention from the people's core demands.

Pro-BJP social media accounts and sections of the Ladakh administration have aggressively sought to discredit the movement, accusing it of being influenced by Pakistan or other foreign actors, a claim dismissed by



many within India's strategic and security community.

Several top army and police veterans have cautioned the government and the Right-wing ecosystem against branding Ladakhis as anti-national, warning that such profiling could have serious national security consequences.

Looking at his past, which includes founding of Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) and launch of Operation New Hope in 1994, a collaboration of government, village communities and the civil society to bring reforms in the government school system, the ruling dispensation's tactics to defame him is bound to backfire badly. No saner element in society barring the blind followers of the ruling ecosystem is going to be influenced by such moves.

His invention of the Stupa technique that creates artificial glaciers, used for storing winter water in the form of a cone-shaped ice heap has already earned him a profile both within the country as well as abroad that a campaign to vilify him would not carry any credibility.

Wangchuk's contributions to Ladakh's education sector, climate-related challenges, and innovative solutions to local problems have earned him numerous accolades which includes 15 prestigious awards.

As things stand now, the LAB has refused to talk to the Centre and has declared that unless false charges against Wangchuk are withdrawn and he along with others are not released from prisons, no further negotiations.

From all accounts, the ruling dispensation has shot in its own foot as Wangchuk has emerged a bigger hero now than he was ever before.

**(Author, a Humboldt University PhD, is a veteran journalist and think-tanker.)**



# Agriculture: Fields of Promise, Futures in Peril



**Prof. Saket Kuswaha**

Indian agriculture, often romanticized as the nation's heartbeat, embodies resilience amid relentless hardship. For generations, it has symbolized abundance, tradition, and self-sufficiency, feeding over 1.4 billion people and employing nearly

50% of the workforce. Yet, beneath this veneer lies a stark reality: prosperity remains an elusive promise, thwarted by structural inequities, volatile markets, and environmental pressures. The sector contributes about 18% to India's GDP, but its growth has stagnated at 3-4% annually, far below the potential of 5-6% envisioned in national policies.



# Nutrition Is Nationhood

## From soil to soul- India's food is its fight for freedom.

To safeguard its agricultural future, India must redefine food security as nutritional sovereignty. Policymakers, scientists, and citizens need to collectively resist the drift toward genetic dependency and ultra-processed imports. The government should introduce a Food Genetic Transparency Bill, strengthen labeling norms, and fund research on soil health, post-harvest infrastructure, and climate-resilient farming.

Public campaigns should promote traditional food habits—millets, pulses, cold-pressed oils, and seasonal vegetables—linking biodiversity to health. Trade deals must prioritize public welfare over corporate profit. Science must serve the soil, not shareholders.

India's population is not its



weakness—it is its vitality. But that vitality must be nourished, not exploited. The time has come to restore food to its rightful place—not as a corporate commodity, but as a cultural inheritance and a national trust.

If mutation continues unchecked, it will erode not only the health of our soil and citizens but the moral foundation of our civilization itself. It is time for nutrition—not mutation—to shape the nation's destiny.

The government's ambitious pledge to double farmers' incomes by 2022—extended indefinitely amid implementation gaps—sparked initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) and the National Agriculture Market (eNAM). Launched in 2019, PM-KISAN provides 6,000 annually in three installments to small and marginal farmers, reaching over 11 crore beneficiaries by 2024, with the 19th installment disbursed on February 24, 2025, totaling 22,000 crore to 9.8 crore farmers, including 2.4 crore women. This direct benefit transfer has cushioned rural distress, injecting liquidity for seeds, fertilizers, and household needs. Complementing it, eNAM, a digital platform for transparent trading, now integrates 1,361 mandis across 23 states, facilitating ₹3.5 lakh crore in transactions by mid-2024 and reducing intermediaries' grip.

Despite these strides, deeper fault lines persist. The National Sample Survey Office's (NSSO) 2019 Situation Assessment Survey—updated with 2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure data—reveals that 68% of agricultural households earn less than 10,000 monthly, with cultivation

income averaging just 4,476 per month, or 33% of total household earnings. Wage labor and livestock rearing fill the gap, but rising input costs erode margins: fertilizers surged 32% since 2020 (Fertiliser Association of India, 2024), diesel 25%, and seeds 15-20%. Smallholders, comprising 86% of farmers with less than 2 hectares, bear the brunt, trapped in a cycle of debt—average outstanding loans hit 74,000 per household in 2023 (NABARD).

Market distortions exacerbate vulnerabilities. Monopsonistic buyers and fragmented supply chains suppress prices, while climate shocks and policy silos hinder diversification. The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), with 1 lakh crore allocated since 2020, has sanctioned 50,000 projects, but ground-level absorption lags at 40%. Without addressing land fragmentation, credit access (only 50% of small farmers insured), and skill gaps, these schemes risk becoming band-aids on a hemorrhaging system. The farmer is not just a producer but the custodian of India's rural soul—his prosperity demands holistic reform, blending technology, equity, and sustainability to transform promise into practice.



## Sowing dreams, reaping struggles- when will farmers harvest true prosperity?

**From Nutrition to Mutation:** India's journey from food scarcity to self-reliance is often celebrated as a triumph of science and policy. Yet, beneath this success story lies a troubling transition—from nutrition to mutation—driven by unchecked genetic modification, chemical agriculture, and imported food chains. What began as a promise to feed the nation has evolved into a silent health and ecological crisis.

Bt cotton remains India's only officially approved genetically modified crop. Initially hailed for its pest resistance, it now reflects the limitations of monoculture biotech.

Cotton productivity has fallen from 566 kg/ha in 2013–14 to around 436 kg/ha in 2023–24, while pest resistance and input costs have surged. The ecological consequences—secondary pests, increased pesticide use, and soil depletion—have worsened farmer distress rather than alleviated it.

Beyond cotton, GM mustard (DMH-11) was granted environmental release approval in 2022 but remains under judicial review due to biosafety concerns. GM brinjal and soy continue to face public resistance and legal hurdles. Reports by Down to Earth and other independent observers note





that GM crops have often failed to reduce pesticide use or improve nutrition in practice. The long-term health effects—ranging from digestive issues to gut microbiome alteration—remain scientifically uncertain, warranting deeper study rather than dismissal.

The crisis extends to edible oils. India, the world's largest importer of palm oil, imported around 9 million tonnes in 2023–24, mainly from Malaysia and Indonesia. However, consumers remain largely unaware of the genetic or chemical status of these oils due to the absence of mandatory GMO labeling. Without

transparent disclosure of origin or processing, citizens unknowingly consume altered or refined products that may impact metabolic and gut health.

This opacity is not merely a health issue—it reflects a governance deficit. India urgently needs a Food Genetic Transparency Bill mandating full disclosure of GMO content, source, and health risk assessments. At the same time, national campaigns must encourage the revival of traditional food systems based on local grains, oils, and biodiversity. Reclaiming ancestral diets is not nostalgia—it's nutrition science grounded in cultural wisdom.



## From wholesome harvests to hidden risks- can India's plate reclaim its purity?

India, GMOs, and the Politics of Vulnerability

Globally, genetically modified agriculture is shaped by geopolitical power. The United States, home to major biotech corporations, remains the largest GMO producer and exporter. European Union countries, by contrast, have largely banned GMO cultivation and enforce strict labeling laws. India, caught between these blocs, faces subtle pressure to liberalize its GMO policies under the guise of trade facilitation and food security.

This influence operates through trade negotiations, multinational lobbying, and intellectual property regimes. Participation in forums like the WTO and IPEF often carries the implicit expectation that India align its biosafety norms with “international standards”—a euphemism for corporate-driven



frameworks. As a result, India's fragmented landholdings, weak extension systems, and limited consumer awareness make it vulnerable to policy capture.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has warned that importing or cultivating GM crops without clear segregation could damage India's GMO-free export reputation, particularly in Europe, where such products face rejection. The economic stakes are high:

any contamination could raise testing costs and erode competitiveness. Yet, biotech multinationals view India's population of 1.4 billion as a lucrative testing ground for GMO expansion.

India's demographic scale, however, should be a strength, not a liability. Allowing foreign corporates to define what Indians eat is not progress—it's bio-colonialism. Being a developing nation does not mean being a dumping ground for experimental agriculture. True sovereignty lies in the right to safe food, seed independence, and ecological dignity. India must assert, unequivocally: “We will feed our people, but not poison them.”

(Author, a distinguished agriculture scientist, currently serves as the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ladakh. He may be accessed via email: [saketkushwaha@gmail.com](mailto:saketkushwaha@gmail.com))

# The Downfall of Education in India

**How ideological capture, market forces, and administrative decay are dismantling India's public education system?**



**Devesh Dubey**

India's education system faces a deepening crisis. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promised transformation through flexibility and innovation. Five years later, schools are shutting down, universities are falsifying data, and students are burdened with debt.

Education has become big business. Government schools decline from neglect while private institutions profit from parental anxiety. Teachers are overworked and underpaid. Student indiscipline has risen, reflecting frustration rather than freedom. Anxiety, burnout, and lost motivation have become common among students.

Government universities have become bureaucratic machines. Faculty spend more time organizing events, managing admissions, and manipulating data for rankings than on research or teaching. Faculty rooms once meant for academic debate now focus on political rallies and ideological gatherings. The professor's role has shifted from mentor and scholar

to administrator and event manager. Popularity now depends on grade distribution and political alignment, not academic rigor or the depth of learning achieved in class.

The NEP's push for flexibility has enabled commercial exploitation. The UGC's support for online degrees and international partnerships prioritizes revenue over qual-





ity. Universities outsource teaching to ed-tech platforms while reducing faculty positions in the name of digital efficiency. The state withdraws as the market advances, thriving on parental insecurities and student fears. Marketing has replaced mentorship, and test preparation has replaced teaching. What was supposed to democratize knowledge has become a hyper-commercialized pressure industry.

**The Rankings Racket:** Under the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), institutions routinely manipulate data. Colleges report 100 percent placement despite recruiters being small firms with five employees claiming 200 openings. This mirrors government summit

MoUs worth thousands of crores, of which barely 15-20 percent materialize. All parameters are similarly managed.

The corruption extends to accreditation. In February 2025, the CBI arrested the NAAC chairman and six committee members for accepting bribes cash, gold, laptops, and phones in exchange for A++ ratings.

Colleges selectively report results, highlighting only top performers while others vanish from statistics. Some institutions that openly sell admissions at semester's end still rank among India's best. Universities launch online degrees without qualified faculty for physical classes. The problem has become so widespread that it is now normalized.

NIRF recently announced negative marking for retracted papers and discredited citations the first formal penalties in its methodology. The intention appears reasonable, but implementation remains uncertain.

**The Classroom Crisis:** A student from a NAAC A+ university scored 71 percent in B.Com but could not answer what debit and credit are. When asked how he passed, he smiled and said, "Teacher bolte hainshanti se nakal kar lo." He is not an exception. He represents many students who, unemployable after graduation, will later become faculty themselves, continuing the cycle of incompetence.

The collapse of meritocracy is complete. Teachers who maintain standards are labeled "anti-student." Examinations have become exercises where leniency is rewarded and honesty punished. Grades have lost meaning. Students who expect everything easy graduate unable to reason or work independently. Plagiarism is widespread, doctoral theses are copied, and research, once a pursuit of truth, has become a bureaucratic requirement.

**Ideology Over Inquiry:** While profit drives one half of the collapse, politics drives the other. University appointments increasingly depend on ideological conformity over academic merit. Dissenting voices are

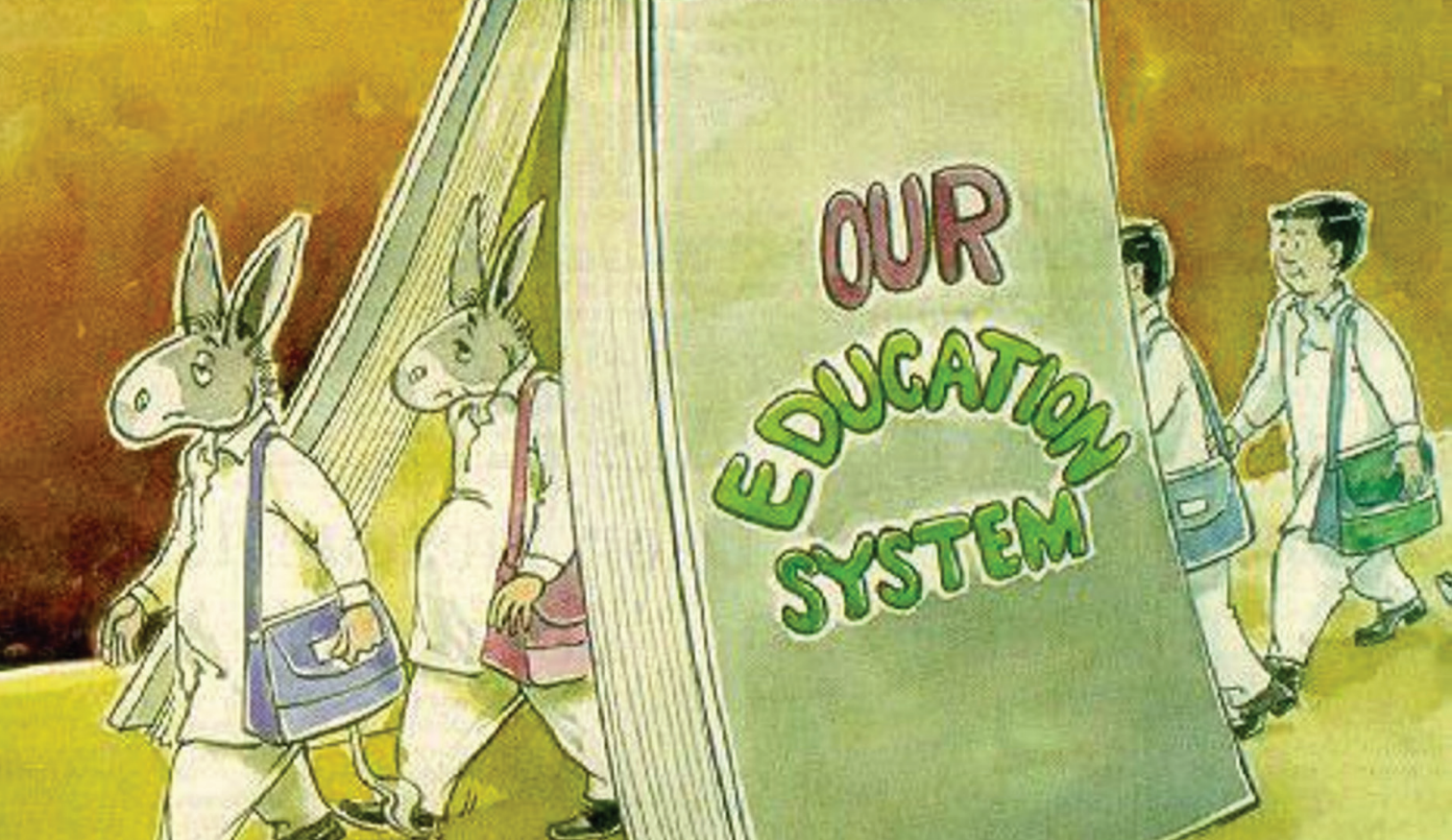
marginalized while loyalty is rewarded. Professors reportedly face questions about dress and community participation during hiring. Colleges that refuse ideological gatherings face staff transfers or administrative punishment. When loyalty to political order becomes the measure of competence, knowledge becomes the casualty. The classroom shifts from a space of questioning to a platform for indoctrination.

This ideological control extends to curricula. Recent NCERT revisions removed references to Mughal history, Darwin's theory of evolution or other similar topics. Key sections on constitutional values and social reformers have been diluted or deleted. The message is clear: inquiry must serve belief, and history must serve power.

The intellectual consequences are serious. A minister asked students who first traveled to space. One answered "Neil Armstrong." The minister corrected him: "Hanuman." The hall applauded. What could have been a lighthearted moment became a symptom of how mythology is being offered as science and belief as fact. When this mindset shapes curriculum, the next generation loses its capacity to think.

**Research and Intellectual Decay:** The crisis runs deepest in research. India produces more academic papers than ever but generates less meaningful knowledge. A significant portion comes not from laboratories or libraries but from AI text generators like ChatGPT and other GenAI tools. Professors under pressure to publish "something, anything" use these tools to produce intellectually hollow papers.

The deception extends throughout research output. Papers fill paid predatory journals, bought in bulk to create the illusion of academic productivity. Under pressure to publish, teachers pay to get meaningless work printed overnight, feeding a system that rewards quantity over quality. Conferences exist mainly for certificates and photo opportunities. Research funding flows to influence, not



ideas. There is little connection between what universities publish and what India needs in climate, agriculture, technology, or public health. India's research system has become an echo chamber: busy, noisy, but empty.

**Psychological and Social Fallout:** Behind every chart and policy lies a quieter human tragedy. Kota, the coaching capital, records dozens of student suicides annually an indictment of a system that mistakes pressure for performance. Students become data points: test scores, cut-offs, placement packages. Individual dreams

are sacrificed to institutional vanity.

Across campuses, alienation is rising. Students who witness corruption at every level fake rankings, research, placements lose faith in education itself. Teachers, stripped of respect and authority, withdraw emotionally. Many graduates lack confidence or curiosity. Some, disillusioned and unemployed, turn to political mobilization instead of professional growth.

**A Manufactured Decline:** It would be unfair to romanticize the past. Post-independence education had weaknesses: limited funding, bureaucratic delays, heavy urban bias. But it produced competent engineers, doctors, scientists, and civil servants who built India's early industrial and research infrastructure. Those institutions, modest in resources, were rich in values and driven by purpose. Teachers were proud of their profession, students respected learning, and the system, for all its flaws, was driven by merit rather than manipulation. The degradation we see today is not natural decline but manufactured collapse.

The irony is that most Indians who achieved global prominence are from India's public institutions when education was affordable, merit-based, and free of political interference. If current trends continue, the next generation of such talent will not emerge from Indian campuses. The recent resignation of the third IIM director in a short span, followed by the appointment of a non-management professional to lead this eminent institute, tells its own story.

**Lessons from Elsewhere:** While India grapples with this chaos, the rest of the world moves in the opposite





direction. China, South Korea, and smaller Southeast Asian nations invest heavily in research universities, teacher training, and technological innovation. China produces twice as many scientists and engineers as India and maintains strict academic accountability. Their universities are not debating whether evolution should be taught they are busy inventing the future.

The United States, despite its inequalities, maintains a strong network of public universities and community colleges that remain relatively affordable and accountable. Professors are free to challenge power. Institutions are evaluated transparently on learning outcomes, not ideological loyalty.

The Nordic countries Finland, Denmark, Norway offer an even better example. There, education is treated as a public good, not a commodity. Teachers are well-paid and trusted. Classrooms are free of political intrusion. Learning emphasizes critical thinking and empathy over rote memorization. Schooling is free, higher education largely public-funded, and academic freedom is sacred. The result: these societies consistently top global education and innovation indices.

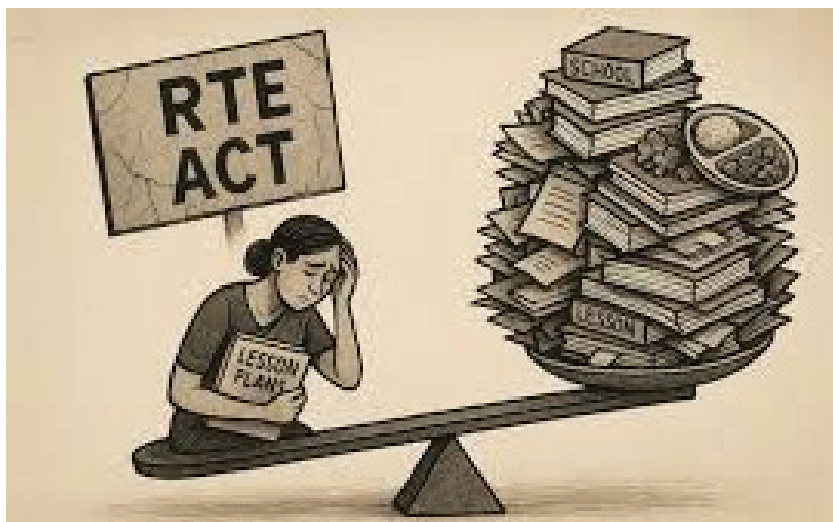
**The Way Out:** The crisis is reversible, but only if recognized as a failure of political will, not just policy design. The government spends barely 3 percent of GDP on education, far below the 6 percent promised since the 1960s. Without public investment, the vacuum will continue to be filled by markets and propaganda.

Universities must be freed from political control. Recruitment should be merit-based and monitored by independent academic bodies. The UGC must purge predatory journals and mandate AI-disclosure policies. Research funding should be tied to real national challenges climate, agriculture, public health not conference attendance. Teachers need to be restored as mentors, not managers. Mental health support must be institutionalized across campuses.

The erosion of education is not just an academic concern but a national crisis. India stands at a crossroads: continue down this path and produce generations of well-certified but poorly educated citizens, or rebuild education as a space of inquiry, equality, and courage.

"A nation's progress is defined not by its wealth, but by the character of its citizens. And character is born in the classrooms." — Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

**(Author, the founder CEO of BeautifulPlanet.Ai which innovates for greener future and sustainable development, is a passionate columnist and educator.)**



## Dismantling of Primary Education System

Primary schooling, once a public responsibility, is being systematically dismantled. Private school fees in small towns now exceed 25,000 annually; in metros, elite schools charge 5-25 lakh. Middle-class parents take loans for basic education. Yet expensive education no longer guarantees quality. Digital boards and glossy brochures have replaced committed teachers and real learning.

At the college level, the disparity is starker. A government college degree that once cost 3-5 lakh now costs 25 lakh at private universities for the same course. MBA programs demand 20-40 lakh in tuition. For middle and lower-class families, this means loans, not opportunity.

One graduate borrowed 8 lakh for his studies; the debt grew to 11.5 lakh with interest and moratorium. After nearly five years of paying 15,000 monthly, years of repayment remain. His degree brought not freedom but financial servitude. Multiply his story by millions and you have a generation burdened with debt before they can start their lives. This is not accidental failure but the deliberate dismantling of public education to make private universities profitable.

# Corruption in Higher Education

## Need to start talking

Prof. C D Adhikary, Dr. Amit Rawat

Higher education institutions (HEIs) occupy a critical position in knowledge production, professional growth, and career mobility. Universities and medical colleges, in particular, are expected to produce skilled professionals, generate research, and serve public interests. Yet, when corruption penetrates these institutions, the symbiotic relationship between education and society is seriously betrayed. Corruption in HEIs can take many forms from overt bribery for admissions and appointments to subtler forms of nepotism, favouritism, misuse of research funds, and procurement fraud. For medical colleges, corruption carries additional risks, endangering patient safety and public health by impairing the training of clinicians and the quality of clinical research.

Recent years have exposed the alarming size of this challenge. In the year 2025, major scandals brought to light many cases of how the regulatory environment in medical education has been compromised: officials of the National Medical Commission (NMC), intermediaries, and private medical college administrators have been implicated in bribery, sharing of confidential inspection schedules, deployment of phantom faculty, and forging of patient records. For example, the Shri Rawatpura Sarkar Institute in Raipur is accused of paying ₹55 lakh to secure a favourable inspection outcome. The Lancet has described the oversight mechanisms as “systemically corrupt and inefficient,” warning that using ghost faculty and staged compliance has become standard in some corners. Simultaneously, India is moving to add tens of thousands of medical seats as an impending response to doctor shortages. However this expansion is being not matched by sufficient capacity and robust regulatory framework. On the global front, corruption remains entrenched: the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index shows that over two-thirds of countries still score below 50 out of 100, indicating pervasive issues in public sector governance. Academic integrity itself is under pressure globally, with recent research highlighting metric-driven publication anomalies, sharp increase in plagiarism and cheating allegations, and institutions gaming ranking systems. These data and cases point to a system under strain, regulatory institutions failing, the gap between legal standards and practice widening and as a consequence students, faculty, and society bearing the costs. In medical education, the stakes are especially high: substandard training translates into compromised healthcare, which can cost lives.

Corruption in higher education institutions is sustained by systemic conditions that weaken accountability while incentivizing rent-seeking. The market-driven expansion of universities and medical colleges, particularly in India where private institutions now dominate the sector, has created an imbalance between demand and regulatory oversight, enabling the sale of seats and commercialization of education. India alone has over 38,000 private colleges as of 2024 (AISHE data) which





outpaces effective regulation. Professional courses like medicine, where demand far exceeds supply, create opportunities for seat-selling, donation quotas, and exam manipulation.

Weak governance and accountability mechanisms, coupled with opaque finances and politicized boards, allow malpractices to go unchecked.

The 2023 CAG report flagged irregularities in several public universities fund utilization, underlining how opacity creates an enabling environment for corruption. Faculty, facing low salaries and precarious contracts, often resort to illicit payments, ghost teaching, or parallel coaching to supplement their income. Contractual hiring has increased globally, with nearly 40% of faculty in Indian universities on temporary contracts (UGC, 2023). Poor salaries push staff toward illicit payments or coaching. Political interference and patronage networks further erode autonomy, as appointments and contracts are allocated through loyalty rather than merit. Universities remain political arenas. In 2025, the CBI investigation into National Medical Commission bribery exposed how officials, politicians, and private colleges colluded to approve substandard institutions. In many cultural contexts, nepotism and clientelism are rationalized as norms, blurring the line between custom and corruption. In some cases information asymmetry and lack of civic oversight allow corruption to flourish making it difficult for students, parents, and civil society to scrutinize institutional functioning. Together, these enabling conditions ensure that corruption is not an anomaly but an embedded feature of higher education governance.

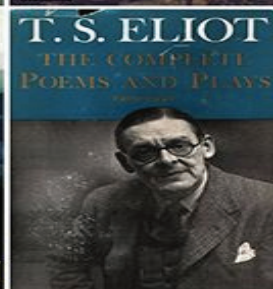
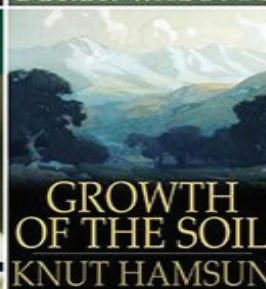
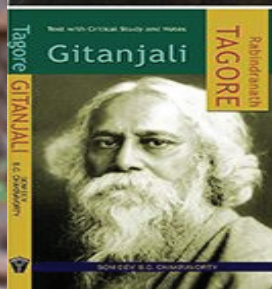
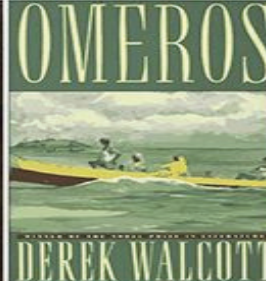
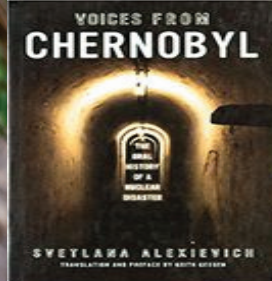
In societies where patron-client relations and family-first hiring are culturally embedded, favouritism in admissions or recruitment is rationalized as obligation rather than corruption. This undermines meritocracy and entrenches exclusionary practices. Evidence from Indian central institutions shows that more than half of the OBC reserved faculty positions and about 40% of SC/ST posts remain vacant, suggesting systemic bias and preferential recruitment of dominant groups under the guise of merit. The vicious cycle does not stop here. Vice-Chancellors in central universities are appointed with particular ideological agenda and political proximity rather than programmes of academic development. Many tainted names come up every now and then who are appointed as heads of public educational institutions. The University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2025 identified 54 private universities across 18 states as defaulters for failing to comply with Public Self-Disclosure Guidelines, which mandate publishing key details on governance, faculty, and finances. Such opacity allows nepotism and favouritism to persist insulated from any public scrutiny. Studies further show that universities with stronger “signals” such as patents, open data, and visible organizational credibility engage more effectively in knowledge exchange, while institutions that withhold information exacerbate asymmetry, leaving students and parents without reliable



indicators of quality. Media reports of favouritism in faculty hiring, admissions, and grant allocation reinforce this perception, though often anecdotal, highlighting a broader transparency deficit. Together, entrenched cultural norms and institutional opacity sustain clientele networks in higher education, making corruption appear customary rather than deviant.

Corruption in higher education doesn't just erode institutional integrity, it also inflicts serious damage on students' mental health and career prospects. When admissions, examinations, and faculty recruitment are marred by bribery, favouritism, and inconsistent processes, deserving students are denied opportunities, breeding chronic frustration, stress, and a pervasive sense of injustice. Data from India illustrate the severity. Student suicides rose by about 65% over the past decade, from 8,423 in 2013 to 13,892 in 2023, with students making up 8.1% of all suicides in 2023, up from 6.2% ten years earlier. For many, exam failure often amplified by perceptions of unfairness or corruption serves as a tipping point toward despair. Career inequality follows students from poorer or marginalized backgrounds that can't play by corrupt rules. Graduates from dubious institutions face devalued credentials and reduced job prospects. Over time, these outcomes not only devastate individual lives but erode trust in institutions, perpetuate social inequality, and undermine the potential of youth as engines of innovation and national development. Addressing corruption requires a systemic approach combining governance reform, transparency, accountability mechanisms, professionalization, ethical culture-building, and civic oversight. Reform is politically challenging but necessary. With coordinated policy action and sustained attention from stakeholders, governments, academic communities, civil society, and international partners higher education can be steered back toward its core mission.

(Dr. Adhikary is a sociology professor at Banaras Hindu University, and Dr. Rawat is a BHU researcher.)



# 'Beauty in the Ruins'

**Laszlo Krasznahorkai: Nobel Laureate for Literature (2025)**



**Dr. Niraj Krishna**

In contemporary literature, there are a few writers whose presence extends far beyond their names—their words, thoughts, and the very soul of their writing shake the reader to the core. Among such writers stands the renowned Hungarian novelist Laszlo Krasznahorkai

Krasznahorkai's style is extraordinary. His sentences are long—sometimes stretching over an entire chapter. Yet this is not merely a stylistic experiment; it is his philosophical instrument. The fluidity of his language drags the reader into the author's mental journey, making them experience the boundaries of reality and the instability of consciousness.

In his writing, the distinction between realism and symbolism becomes blurred. Every scene, every character, and every event is not merely narrative—it represents the human struggle for power, fear, hope, and the search for the soul. His characters are often at war—with themselves and with society—sometimes driven by the hunger for authority, sometimes by the yearning for spiritual awakening.

Krasznahorkai's philosophy is unmistakably pessimistic, yet it never succumbs to despair. His writing is a fascinating fusion of dissatisfaction and search. He presents human consciousness as a perpetual conflict between destruction and creation. His message is clear: modern civilization faces not only political or economic decay but also a profound spiritual disintegration.

Krasznahorkai's literature teaches us that even within chaos, there is music—and that the pursuit of beauty amid destruction is a sacred act. His characters sometimes terrify us, sometimes make us laugh, and often compel us to reflect upon our existence. His world is a blend of noise and silence, where every word is a question and every silence an answer.

His works are not merely stories; they are journeys through human consciousness. Within them, the struggles of individuals, the collapse of societies, and the search for spiritual meaning are portrayed with such depth and subtlety that the reader begins to test their own boundaries and possibilities.

Krasznahorkai has proven that literature is not just a means of entertainment—it can be a mirror of human consciousness and civilization itself. His style, vision, and themes transcend time and place, guiding us through the labyrinth of the modern human soul.

Born in Gyula, Hungary, in 1954, Krasznahorkai was profoundly shaped by the harsh cultural and political conditions of socialist Hungary. From the very beginning, his focus was not merely on describing reality but on exploring the inner instability of human beings—their solitary quests, and the quietly spreading, incomplete forces that reside within society. It is for this reason that his literature becomes a bridge between the European melancholy of the twentieth century and the global loneliness of the twenty-first.

The hallmark of Krasznahorkai's works lies in their complex narratives and extraordinarily long sentences. Sometimes, a single sentence stretches across ten pages, carrying the reader beyond the limits of time and space. This winding, flowing language is not a mere technical device—it is his philosophical tool, through which the depth of thought and the uncertainty of



consciousness reach the reader.

Laszlo Krasznahorkai's literature is a profound philosophical document of human despair and the exhaustion of civilization. His first work, *Satantango* (1985), symbolizes the decay of humanity through the tragedy of a decaying village—later adapted into a film by Béla Tarr.

In *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1989), he unravels the intricate knots of power, fear, and mass psychology, while *War and War* (1999) questions the inevitability of knowledge and destruction.

*Seiobo There Below* (2008) represents the peak of his linguistic and philosophical mastery—where the quest for art, beauty, and transcendence intertwines with diverse cultural symbols. It was this work that earned him the Man Booker International Prize.

His most recent and Nobel Prize-winning novel, *Herscht 07769* (2025), is a philosophical portrait of the spiritual decline of civilization and the redemptive power of art.

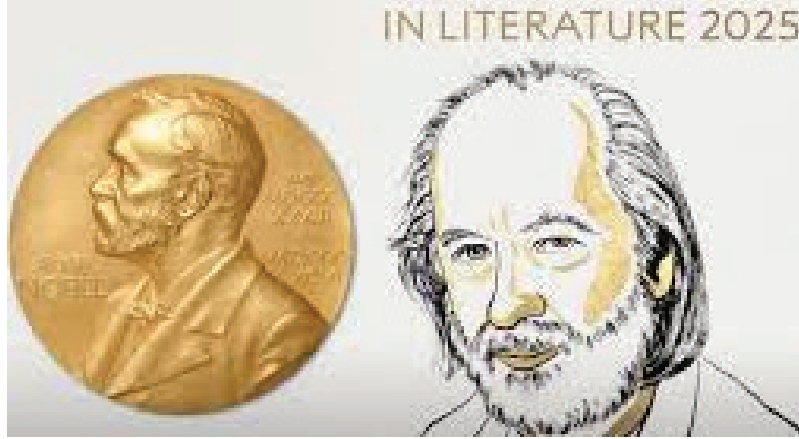
Krasznahorkai's style is marked by long, intricate sentences, symbolic imagery, and deep reflection—rooted in the tradition of Kafka and Bernhard, yet unmistakably his own. His characters grapple with loneliness, fear, and meaninglessness, as if they were layers of human consciousness itself. Susan Sontag called him “the master of apocalypse”—and indeed, his writing teaches us that the end of civilization comes not with an explosion, but with slow, weary exhaustion.

Krasznahorkai's literature is not mere storytelling—it is a record of human consciousness, social fatigue, and the soul's unending journey. His works remind us that the end of civilization does not arrive through chaos, but through the gradual erosion of human sensitivity. His language is a continuous current of thought that carries the reader beyond time and consciousness. Through his characters, we recognize our own fears, desires, and the absurdities of society. That is why his writing is not entertainment—it is a philosophical experience.

The 2025 Nobel Prize is proof that Krasznahorkai's art has transcended borders and become part of the shared consciousness of humanity. His writing also reminds us that even amid chaos, destruction, and despair, the pursuit of beauty and hope remains possible. Whether it is the desolate village of *Satantango*, the mysterious circus of *The Melancholy of Resistance*, the archival officer of *War and War*, or the chaotic universe of *Herscht 07769*—each of his works is a testament to the human search for meaning and the eternal quest for beauty.

Krasznahorkai's literature compels the reader to reflect on the idea that civilization does not merely reside in material or political structures but in the inner consciousness and moral values of humankind. His writing reveals that even when society and the world descend into chaos, the power of art, language, and beauty can still hold humanity steady and self-aware.

After he was awarded the 2025 Nobel Prize in Literature, his name once again became the center of global attention. Yet the true essence of his writing lies in the chaos and existential unease he weaves into his words. The Nobel recognition only reaffirmed that his work is not confined to Hungary or Europe—it has become an integral part of world literature. Readers across the globe see, in his prose, the limits and possibilities of human conscious-



ness. The Nobel Prize was awarded to him “for a language that seeks beauty and peace even within despair.”

Announcing the award, the Nobel Committee described Krasznahorkai as a “great epic writer in the Central European tradition.” According to the committee, his work extends “the literary legacy from Kafka to Thomas Bernhard.” He received the prize for his novel “*Herscht 07769*,” which is based on the cultural legacy of Johann Sebastian Bach. The novel portrays how “terror and beauty coexist within the human spirit.”

Laszlo Krasznahorkai's literature reminds us that the essence of humanity lies not in external events but in our consciousness, our thoughts, and our fatigue. His long, intricate, and philosophical style leads the reader into the depths of crowds, silence, and existence itself. His novels are not mere narratives; they are mirrors of the human spiritual journey, of the decay of society, and of the endless quest for being.

“*Herscht 07769*” and his other works show that literature is not simply a means of entertainment, but a medium for a profound understanding of consciousness and civilization. Krasznahorkai has proven that there is music even within chaos, beauty even within destruction, and a fragment of light even within despair. That is why his literature continues to astonish and mesmerize readers today—serving as a bridge between the melancholy of 20th-century Europe and the loneliness of the 21st-century world.

In 2025, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature “for a language that seeks beauty and peace even in despair.” This honor is not only international recognition of his work but also an affirmation that the literature of the 21st century is not limited to technological or political realities—it can still descend into the depths of the human soul.

Laszlo Krasznahorkai's writing is the chronicle of humanity's final anguish—where hope and despair, life and death, meaning and meaninglessness circle endlessly within the same orbit. His art teaches us that there is a kind of music even within disorder, and that the search for beauty amid destruction is a sacred act. Reading him feels like walking through a vast, melancholic, yet infinitely beautiful universe—where every word is a question and every silence, an answer.

Laszlo Krasznahorkai is not merely a Hungarian author; he is a craftsman of world literature—a creator who guides readers endlessly through the labyrinths of chaos, consciousness, and beauty. His words remind us that literature is not just storytelling—it is the infinite expansion of awareness and the profound expression of humanity itself.

**(Author, a Doctor of Laws, is a regular EW columnist on social, cultural, literary and grassroots issues.)**

## Winter Pollution and Indian Cities



Prof. Govind Singh Rajwar

Thirteen of the world's 20 most polluted cities are located in India, with Byrnihat in Meghalaya claiming the top spot, according to a recent report. The World Air Quality

Report 2024, compiled by Swiss air quality technology firm IQAir, has revealed that Delhi continues to hold the title of the most polluted capital city globally. Meanwhile, India has been ranked as the fifth most polluted country in 2024, a slight improvement from its third-place position in 2023.

This report highlighted that India experienced a 7 per cent reduction in PM2.5 concentrations in 2024, with levels averaging 50.6 micrograms per cubic metre, down from 54.4 micrograms per cubic metre in 2023. Despite this improvement, six of the world's 10 most polluted cities are still in India. Delhi's air quality remained alarmingly poor, with an annual average PM2.5 concentration of 91.6 micrograms per cubic metre, barely lower than the 92.7 micrograms per cubic metre recorded in 2023. The 13 Indian cities featured in the global top 20 most polluted list include Byrnihat, Delhi, Mullanpur (Punjab), Faridabad, Loni, New Delhi, Gurugram, Ganganagar, Greater Noida, Bhiwadi, Muzaffarnagar, Hanumangarh, and Noida. Surprisingly, 35 per cent of Indian cities reported annual PM2.5 levels that exceeded 10 times the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended limit of 5 micrograms per cubic metre.

Air pollution continues to pose a significant health threat in India, with studies estimating that it reduces life expectancy by approximately 5.2 years. A study published in The Lancet Planetary Health last year indicated that around 1.5 million deaths annually in India between 2009 and 2019 were potentially linked to prolonged exposure to PM2.5 pollution. PM2.5 refers to fine particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns, which can penetrate the lungs and bloodstream, leading to respiratory issues, cardiovascular diseases and



even cancer. Major sources of PM2.5 include vehicle emissions, industrial pollution, and the burning of wood or agricultural waste.

Indian megacities exhibited a high increase in air pollution during the winters of the last year, where Delhi's atmosphere with worst pollution levels was the most polluted city in the country. Other megacities, including Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru, also showed a sharp increase in the pollution levels. It has been reported by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) that Delhi and Kolkata, both situated in the Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP), recorded the highest pollution levels, whereas Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru saw rapid localised pollution build-up, despite

their comparatively favourable climates. The study also quotes data for some megacities: Kolkata ranked as the second most polluted megacity with a winter PM2.5 average of 65  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , followed by Hyderabad (52  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ), Mumbai (50  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ), Bengaluru (37  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) and Chennai (36  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ). Delhi remained the most polluted megacity, registering eight days of 'severe+' AQI, 12 days of 'severe' AQI, 68 days of 'very poor' AQI, and no 'good' AQI days this winter, according to the CSE report for 2024-25 winter.

Efficient strategy needs to be adopted for the cities showing very high pollution levels. Pollution caused by vehicles, industry, power plants, waste burning, burning of fossil fuels and construction work



needs to be controlled to combat the effect of pollution during winters. The National Clean Air Programme must ensure stringent action be taken in all megacities to prevent winter spikes to meet the clean air standards. The adverse climatic condition of Delhi is attributed to its location in land-locked land in the Indo-Gangetic Plains (IGP) and followed by the adverse condition of climate shown by Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru which showed increases in average PM2.5 concentrations.

According to CSE, the peaking of pollution during winter in any climatic zone is a sign of the underlying problem of persistent air pollution in these rapidly urbanising and motorising cities. It has been suggested in by CSE report that in megacities the use of public transport and imposing fines on high-emission vehicles could help mitigate pollution.

The eighth (2025) Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) report, produced by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC) released last week, establishes a global warming link to air pollution, surprisingly in the United States and Canada, however, the global air pollution hotspot remains in South Asia. The latest data indicate how much air pollution is estimated to shorten lives, and New Delhi tops the global list continuing for last eight years till the current year. The report says that the Indian megacity's pollution level in 2023 was high enough to shave off 8.2 years of a person breathing its polluted air over the long term, and South Asia remains the most polluted region in the world. In such countries the impact of particulate pollution on life expectancy is nearly twice that of childhood and maternal malnutrition and more than five times that of unsafe water, sanitation and handwashing.

Air pollution poses the greatest threat to life expectancy in South Asian countries, in comparison to other major risks. While India's capital Delhi has topped the AQLI list for each of the eight reports so far, the data shared with Health Policy



Watch shows a declining trend. It's down from almost 10 years of life expectancy potentially lost in the 2018 report to 8.2 years in the latest report. While India and its cities continue to dominate rankings such as AQLI, the government points to a series of measures it has implemented in the past decade. It informed Parliament last month that the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) launched in January 2019, has shown positive results in reducing pollution. As many as 22 cities have met the national standards, which aren't as stringent as WHO's recommendations.

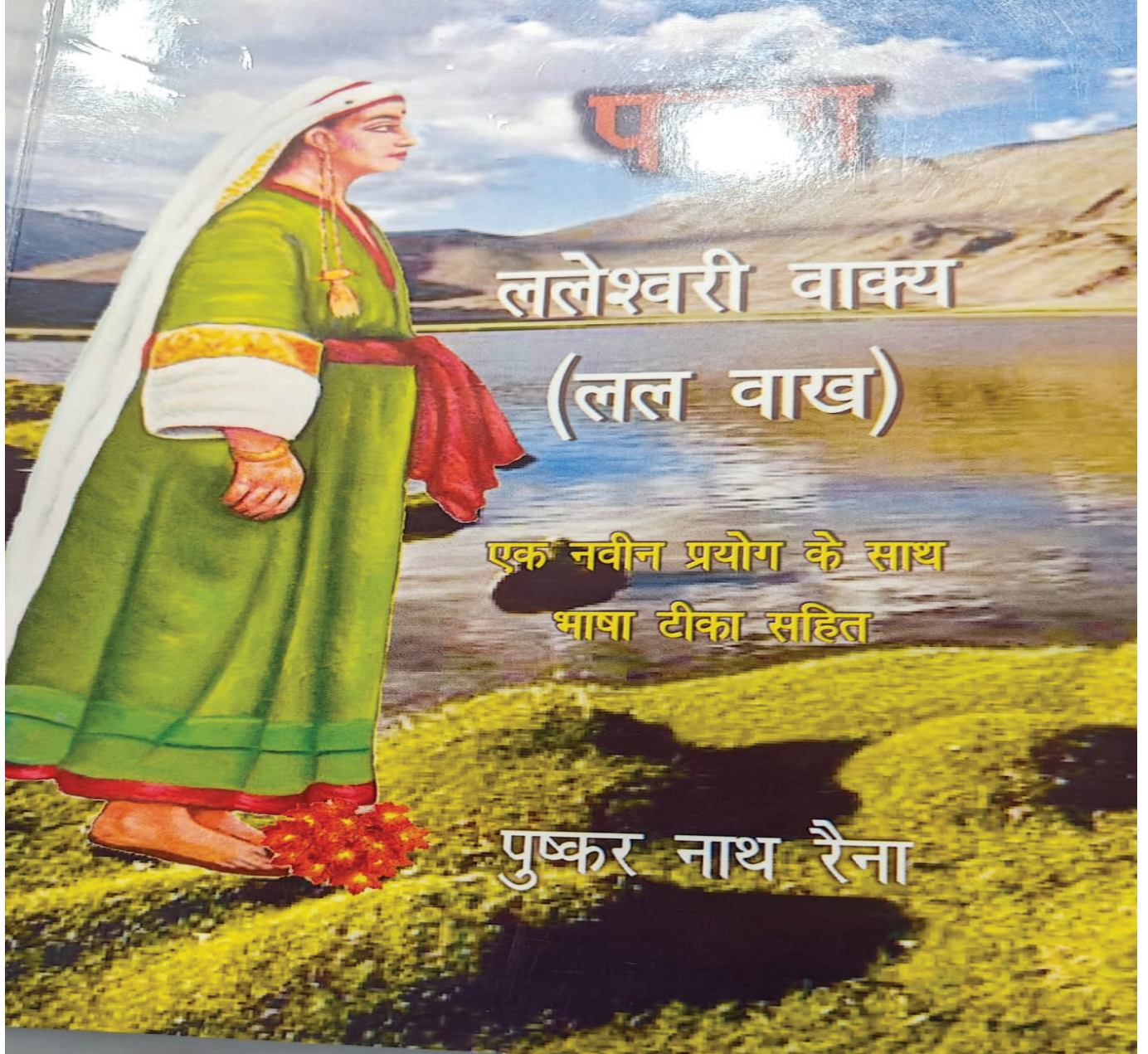
Across India, a network of real-time, high-quality monitors has been installed, from a handful in 2014 to almost 600 now. It 'leap-frogged' fuel standards, jumping from Bharat Stage 4 to BS 6 (BS being at par with Euro standards). The most significant programme was NCAP which aimed to cut pollution in about a hundred cities. Since then it expanded the

cities covered to about 130, and the raised the target to cut pollution levels by 40% by 2026. The year-to-year differences in these estimates reflect actual measured changes in pollution levels. To a lesser extent, they may also be influenced by improvements in the underlying satellite-derived models.

The AQLI team wants the 'life index' to resonate with people by communicating the health consequences of air pollution shortening their lifespans. They reason that when communities have access to data on the air they breathe, and understand its impact on their health, they are more likely to take protective action and push governments toward accountability.

**(Author, a distinguished environmentalist, is Vice Chancellor of Sparsh Himalayan University. He is also a Fellow of Linnaean Society of London.)**





# Lalla Waakh: Spiritual Essence of Kashmir Shaivism



R.C. Ganjoo

KASHMIR, the land of Sufis and saints, has produced eminent scholars. Mata Lallaishwari, an icon of Kashmir, is a well-

known poetess of Vakhs in the Kashmiri language and was an elevated saint, fully conversant with Kashmir Shaivism. She brought the essence of Kashmir Shaivism before the masses through the people's own language, which was welcomed and responded all over.





Writing about “The great ages of man” written in ‘Life and Time’ journal in its historic topic INDIA, Karlavel Shelberg has mentioned under 14th Century chapter, “A Kashmiri woman poetess ‘Lal’ is writing poems in praise of SHIVJI” ( Prof. J.L. Kaul – Lulded JKC Acedemy 1984).

It is pertinent to mention here that George Grierson was impressed by the high philosophical content and linguistic richness of Lalla Waakh (Lal Ded or Lalla Yogeshwari was a popular 14th century Kashmiri saint poetess). Waakh travelled from one generation to another by word of mouth. No manuscript was available. In 1914, Grierson assigned Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri the task of compiling all the writings of Lalla Waakh. Pt. Mukand Ram came across a saint, Dharam Dass Darvesh of Guchhgam, who had memorised Lalla Waakh by heart. Pt. Mukand Ram Shastri recorded the waakh from Darvesh and handed it over to Grierson.

When Sir Richard Carnac Temple, a British Indologist, edited the sayings of Lal Ded, he traced Pt. Mukand Ram’s genealogy as well and described him thus. "Pt. Mukand Ram Shastri was a living pupil in the line of descendants of the founder of the Kashmiri Shavism Acharaya Abhanaya Gupta."

In my opinion the main aim of writing the book ‘PARAG -Lalvakhs’, is to make the public aware of the deliberate conspiracy to bring Maa Lalded to the level of a simple Kashmiri Muslim poetess, second to ‘Ziyarati Hazrat Sayed Mohmamad Quraishi and Hazrat Lal Arifa’. Written on the face of the reshaped original Kutya at Bijbihara, Kashmir, showing her buried there .

Secondly, to disprove that Lalded was nude and wandering like a mad saint. She was well educated and showed Sayed Ali Hamdani his position of fleeing from Hamdan to Kashmir to save his life from riding a smoldering horse ordered by Timoor to kill all Sayeds in this way, in comparison, a Kashmiri woman saint came out alive with glamour from the burning furnace. She warned Kashmiris converting to the other faith for lustful people would accept her utterance.

And likewise, to the record right about a profound Shavite of Kashmir-Lalded and correct all concocted misgivings, disfiguring her extremely realistic Vakhs, meanings, and negative interpretations and place of her

birth as ‘Pandrathan’ instead of ‘Sempore’, etc., with proper explanations.

**PARAG Writer Pushkar Nath Raina:** The writer of the book is of firm belief that Maa Lalded was well read and not naked as she said, ‘wear the clothes that saves from cold and cover our body’ Paragvakh - ‘Lord Shiva being a horse and Lord Keshava (Veshnu) as its saddle, Lord Brahmaji as hanging peddles or riqabs, whom only an expert yogi recognises with utmost dedication, who is such a horse-trainer to ride on it?

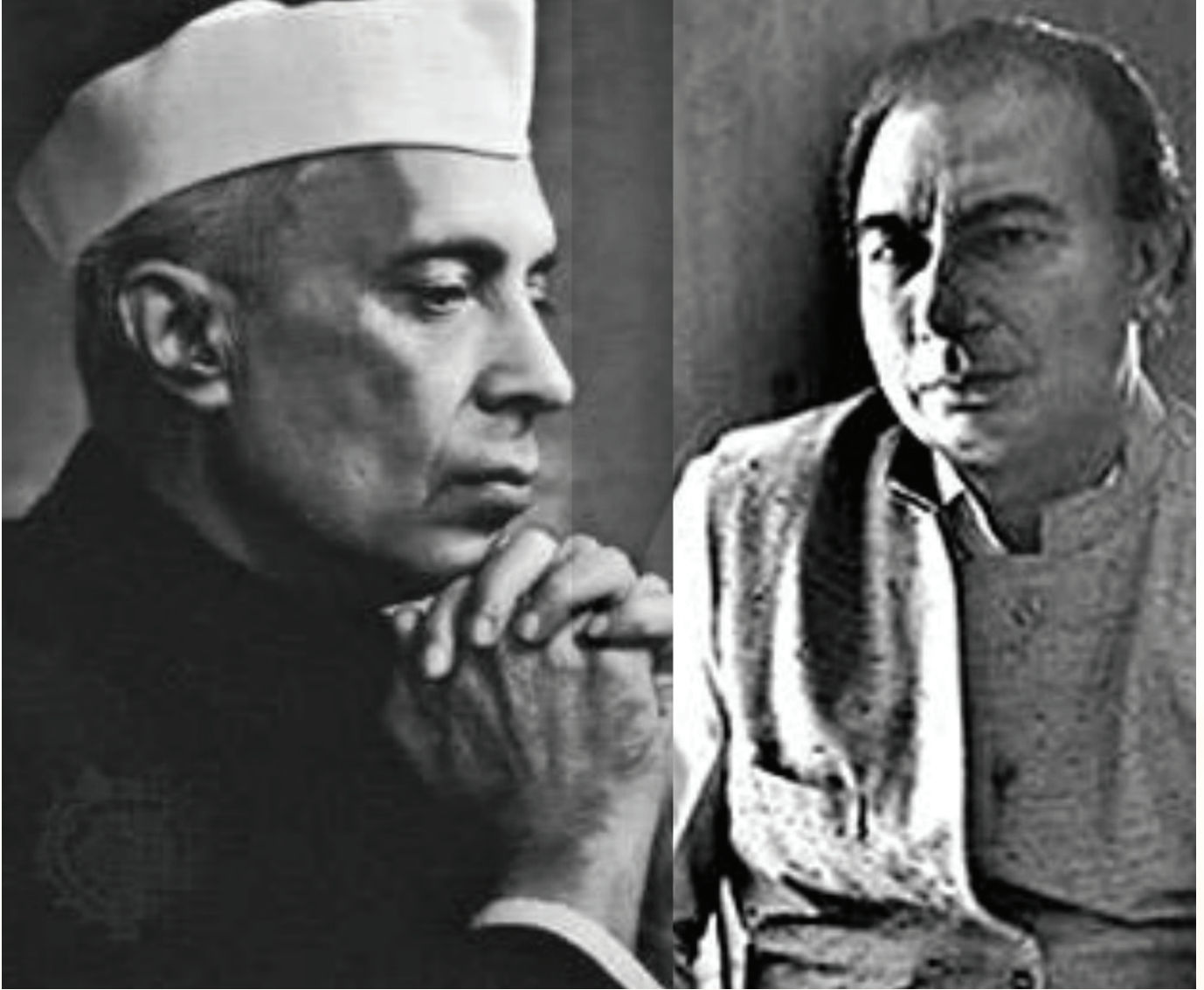
In Paragvakh 186, she puts forth her answer: as ‘that who hears the unbeaten cosmic sound, is in the form of cosmos (sky), without name, Gotra, Varna and form and is conversant with Nad, Bindu and is ‘ I ’ and knows ‘I am that’-he is an expert yogi deva, a horse trainer who can ride it’. The gravity of Vakhs is the answer to many critics. The vakhs can’t be understood unless one knows the ‘Kashmir Shavism’.

The book PARAG written in Hindi shows that Lalvakhs are divided into five categories or stages based on the Natya Shastra of sage Bharat Muni, and a sixth category, named ‘PARAG’ by the writer.

Acharya Bharat Muni, writer of the Natya-Shastra, comprises of 36 chapters corresponding to 36 Tatvas of Kashmir Shavism. From Param Shiva to manifestation and the reverse process is very intricate. This reality is made public in the form of a Nataka in 5 stages, i.e., start, trials, hopeful after meeting some guide, wait to meet and joyful result. Mata Lalded exactly states her journey with such 5 stages from start to the desired aim. Lalmata has clearly prohibited many actions like offering a live sheep to a dead stone, a temple and its idol all stones, instead control your mind and breath, also guides us method of realising Shiva which is very tough to get at.

PARAG book is as such, a guideline for the seekers about the path adopted by Mata Lalded. The 6th chapter of the book clarifies that the PARAG or the pollen of matured flowers of Lalvakhs is to benefit by scattering pollan of knowledge, for the aspirants who are a match for it. PARAG book has shown possible word-by-word meanings of Lalvakhs in Hindi

**(Author, a senior journalist, has written two books on politics and culture of Kashmir.)**



# “Jism Ki Maut Koi Maut Nahi Hoti hai” The Immortal Voice of Sahir Ludhianvi



**Hasnain Naqvi**

**Forty-five years after Sahir Ludhianvi’s death on 25 October 1980, his words remain imperishable:**

jism kii maut koi maut nahii.n hotii  
jism miT jaane se insaan nahii.n miT jaate...

Originally written as a tribute to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, these lines became a fitting epitaph for Sahir himself — a poet whose mortal body may have perished, but whose spirit still breathes through every verse, every song, and every pulse of resistance that refuses silence.

Born Abdul Hayee on March 8, 1921, in Ludhiana, Sahir grew into one of the greatest Urdu poets and lyricists of the 20th century. His life was marked by

pain, protest, and poetry. His words carried fire, tenderness, rebellion, and love, all bound by an unyielding conscience. From Talkhiyan to Parchhaiyaan, from Pyaasa to Kabhie Kabhie, Sahir’s art captured the ache of existence and the hope for a fairer world.

“Aurat Ne Janam Diya Mardon Ko...”

**A Poet with a Conscience**

Few poets wrote about women with the empathy and moral clarity that Sahir did. His celebrated lines — aurat ne janam diyaa mardon ko mardon ne usse baazaar diyaa...

— pierce through centuries of patriarchy. He saw woman not as muse or metaphor but as victim, rebel, and creator.

His early experiences — his parents’ bitter separation and his mother Sardar Begum’s struggle — shaped



his lifelong empathy for the marginalized. His poetry exposed how men commodified women, society masked exploitation with morality, and religion sanctified injustice. Yet his feminism was never ornamental; it arose from lived experience and moral conviction.

For Sahir, poetry was not a refuge from the world but a mirror held to its hypocrisies. He wrote of love but also of hunger, of loneliness but also of injustice.

log aurat ko faqat jism samajh lete hai.n,  
he warned — a line that still cuts into the conscience of our times.

**“Tu Hindu Banega Na Musalman Banega...”**



#### The Shayar of the People

Sahir’s work was inseparable from his worldview. He was not merely a poet of emotions but of ethics. His celebrated lyric from *Dhool Ka Phool* —

tu hindu banegaa na musalmaan banegaa  
insaan kii aulaad hai insaan banegaa

— was not only a song; it was a manifesto for India’s secular soul.

In the aftermath of Partition, when bigotry tore the subcontinent apart, Sahir’s verse insisted on the indivisibility of humanity. His was the voice of Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb, the syncretic spirit that defined India’s cultural pluralism.

His editorial stints in Lahore during the 1940s and the publication of *Talkhiyan* in 1945 established him as a fierce young poet of dissent. When his writings invited the ire of the Pakistani government, he moved to Bombay, now Mumbai in 1949 — where Urdu poetry met the magic of Hindi cinema.

In the studios of Bombay, Sahir carried his pen like a torch. He refused to let commerce domesticate his craft. Even in film lyrics, his words bore the stamp of his conscience. His collaborations with S.D. Burman, O.P. Nayyar, Roshan, N. Datta, Madan Mohan, Jaidev and Ravi produced melodies that were as reflective as they were revolutionary. But when creative integrity clashed with studio egos, Sahir never hesitated to walk away.

#### “Khoon Phir Khoon Hai...”

The Poet as Rebel and Anti-War Crusader

Sahir’s pen was not confined by borders or time. His verse spoke for every oppressed soul, whether in India or abroad. After the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, his poem *Khoon Phir Khoon Hai* thundered across the world:

zulm phir zulm hai, baDhtaa hai to miT jaataa hai  
khoon phir khoon hai, tapkega to jam jaayega

It was both prophecy and warning — the poet’s faith that tyranny contains the seed of its own destruction. In *Awaaz-e-Adam*, written in 1949, he declared: dabegii kab talak aawaaz-e-Adam, hum bhii dekhe. nge...

— words that remain an anthem against every form of silencing.

His collection *Parchhaiyaan* (Shadows) was an anti-war masterpiece. There he juxtaposed global conflict with private heartbreak, exposing how war consumes not only bodies and nations but also tenderness and dreams.

guzashtaa ja.ng me.n ghar hii jale magar is baar  
a‘jab nahii.n ke ye parchhaiyaa.n bhii jal jaaye.n

Through these verses, Sahir became both witness and conscience — articulating the pain of an age scarred by war, displacement, and ideological betrayal.

“Yeh Duniya Agar Mil Bhi Jaye Toh Kya Hai...”

When Poetry Became Song

If Urdu literature lost a poet to cinema, Indian cinema gained its conscience. Sahir revolutionized the world of film lyrics, proving that poetry and popular art could coexist. His songs were at once lyrical and radical, romantic and reflective.

In *Pyaasa* (1957), his song —ye dunyaa agar mil bhii jaaye to kyaa ha



— turned existential despair into a moral question: what is success in a corrupt world?

In *Sadhna*, his aurat ne janam diyaa mardon ko became a feminist cry. In *Barsaat Ki Raat*, the qawwali — ye ishq ishq hai, ishq ishq

— transcended sectarianism:

ishq azaad hai, hindu na musalmaan hai ishq  
aap hii dharm hai aur aap hii imaan hai ishq





His songs like Thandii Hawaayein, Jayen To Jayen Kahaan, Abhi Na Jao Chhodkar, and Kabhi Kabhi Mere Dil Mein Khayaal Aata Hai became part of India's collective emotional memory. Each lyric carried the stamp of Sahir's thought — never mere rhymes, but reflections on life, longing, and loss.

As a lyricist, Sahir never compromised his integrity. He demanded royalties equal to composers and insisted that lyricists be credited alongside singers and musicians. He democratized the industry in ways few others dared.

“Mai.n Pal Do Pal Kaa Shaayar Huu.N...”

The Legacy of an Unfading Flame

Sahir once wrote:

mai.n pal do pal kaa shaayar huu.N

pal do pal merii kahaanii hai

pal do pal merii hastii hai

pal do pal merii javaanii hai..

But time has proved that he was not a poet of moments but of epochs.



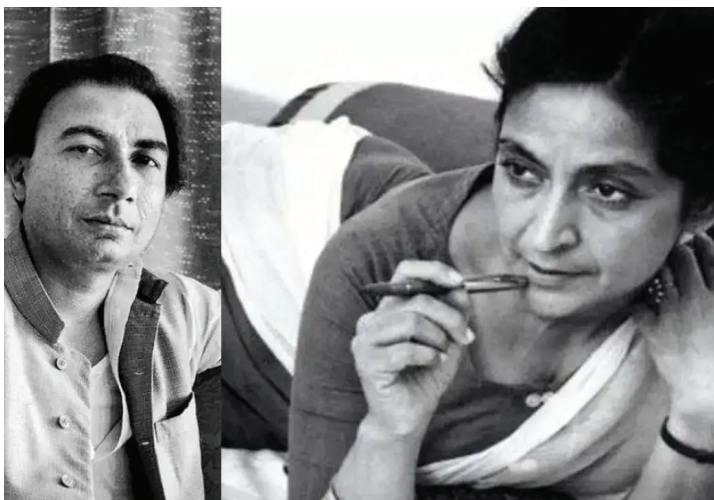
His collections Talkhiyan and Parchhaiyaan remain classics of Urdu literature — bridging personal anguish and collective conscience. Later works like Aao Ki Koyi Khwaab Bune (1971) and Gaata Jaaye Banjaara (1974) reaffirmed his belief in poetry's power to heal and to disturb.

Despite honours like the Padma Shri (1971) and a

commemorative stamp issued decades later, Sahir's true recognition lies in his continued relevance.

In Pakistan, scholars have studied him as part of the Progressive Writers' Movement; in India, his legacy deserves deeper rediscovery.

Sahir lived and died on his terms — solitary yet surrounded by songs, skeptical yet compassionate, revolutionary yet romantic. His relationships — with Amrita Pritam, Sudha Malhotra, his mother, and his muse-like ideals — fed his art with a rare emotional honesty.



Today, his voice resounds wherever injustice reigns or love seeks meaning. For as long as there are listeners to dream, dissent, and feel, Sahir will not die. His poetry, like his creed, stands eternal:

maut kitnii bhii sa.ngdil ho magar  
zindagii se to mehrabaan hogii  
niT naye ranj dil ko detii hai  
zindagii har khushii kii dushman hai  
maut sabse nibaah kartii hai  
zindagii, zindagii kii dushman hai  
kuchh na kuchh to sukuun paayegaa  
maut ke bas me.n jiskii jaan hogii  
maut kitnii bhii sa.ngdil ho magar  
zindagii se to mehrabaan hogii  
(No matter how ruthless death may seem,  
She is still kinder than life.  
Each day, life gives new sorrows,  
Life is an enemy of every joy.  
Death keeps faith with everyone —  
Life is the foe of life itself.)

One who falls into death's embrace will find some peace,

For however cruel death may be,  
She is gentler than life.)

**(Author, a former member of the history faculty at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, is a regular EW columnist on art, culture, literature and diversity issues.)**





# kolkata INTERNATIONAL ARTFAIR

January 10 - 16, 2026, At EZCC, Salt Lake, Kolkata



Organised by:  
**GUILD OF FINE ART & ARTISTS (GOFAA)**

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- Venue: Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC), Salt Lake, Kolkata 700106
- Dates: January 10-16, 2026
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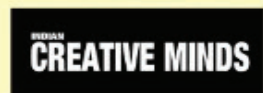
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Shri Guruve Namah* ”

